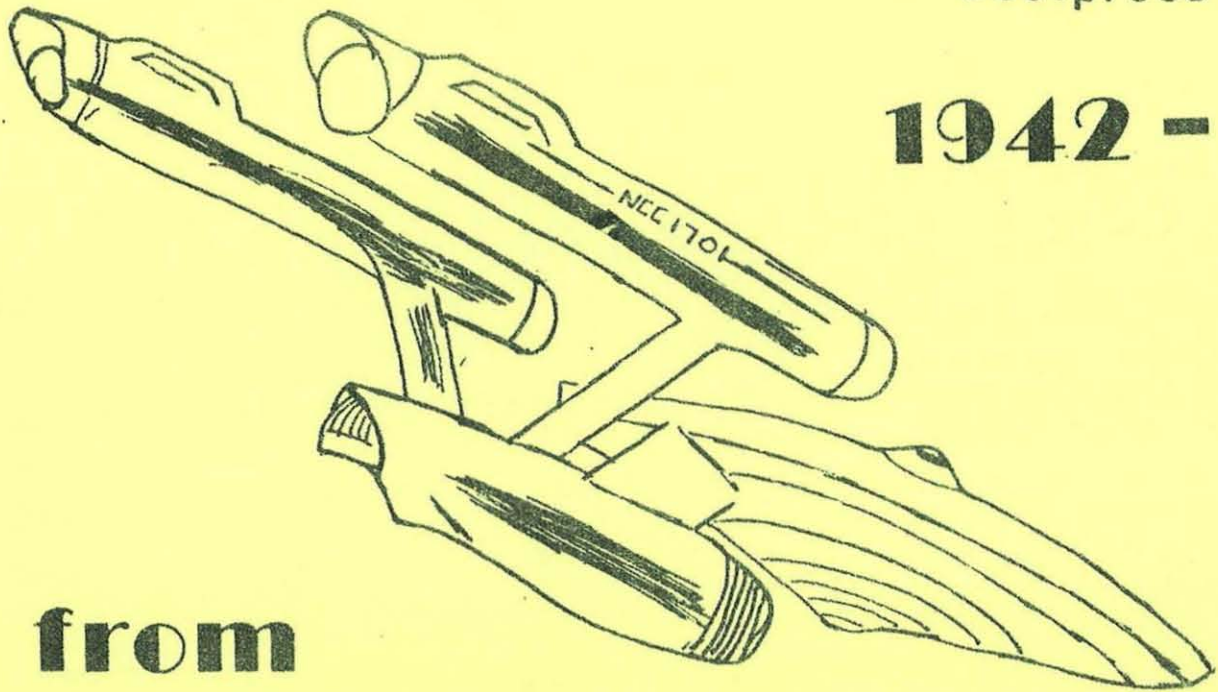


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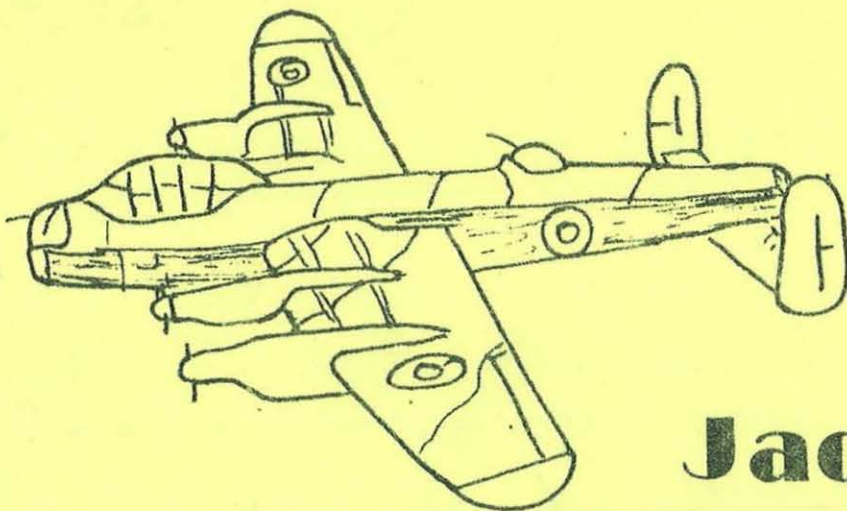


from

STARSHIP

to

LANCASTER



by

Jackie Regan

&

Joyce Devlin

a **STAR TREK**
fanzine

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FROM STARSHIP TO LANCASTER

by

Jackie Regan

and

Joyce Devlin

A Scotpress publication

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CAPTAIN'S LOG: STARDATE 8211.11

As per Admiralty orders included herein, the Enterprise is now en route for the planet Azaria. Our mission has a class one priority red condition attached to it, therefore we are under communications silence, except for the Starfleet Priority Channel which is open to receive further information from Starfleet Command. Log entry closed.

Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise switched off the log microphone and eased himself down into the command chair. Now all he had to do was wait. Kirk was never happy waiting around; he hated being in the dark about any mission, but especially this one which would involve the Guardian of Time.

The one thing Kirk was grateful for was that the Guardian of Time, although similar in some respects to the Guardian of Forever, was not an unfathomable entity. The Guardian of Time was humanoid, the last descendant of his race, left in sole charge of a time machine. Even he could not fully comprehend its intricate circuits and logic boards. His task was simple, to assist those who wished to turn back the pages of time to enter a past era and observe the culture and scientific achievement of any given time. Sometimes the power that they held overcame all of the good intentions of these observers; some decided that they did not wish to return to their own time, because they found that they could alter history to suit their own, sometimes greedy, ends. The mission awaiting Kirk apparently was indeed something to do with the altering of the history of Earth; not for personal gain, however, but to help a nation win a war it would otherwise lose. What little information Kirk had on the mission he did not like.

"Mr. Spock."

"Captain?"

"I would be glad of your views in this matter."

Spock turned from his computer station; stepping down the three small steps to Kirk's side, he began. "It would seem that Starfleet made an error of judgment in permitting this scientist the opportunity to go back in time."

Spock's words were a simple statement of the facts as he saw them. "Indeed, Spock, a grave error. Admiral Hailey is investigating the reasons why it was allowed," Kirk informed the First Officer.

McCoy, the ship's Chief Medical Officer, stood silently by, listening to the conversation between his Captain and his old adversary, Spock. The doctor felt that perhaps it was time for him to ask a question.

"What I don't understand, Jim, is how in heaven's name did he slip through the assessments without being found?" McCoy's craggy features creased in a frown.

"I fail to see what heaven has to do with it, Doctor," Spock said, raising his eyebrows questioningly.

"Just a figure of speech, Spock," Kirk put in hastily.

"I just can't believe it. I mean, Starfleet's security is watertight!" McCoy continued in the same vein.

"Apparently not on this occasion," Spock replied.

"That is what Admiral Hailey is investigating," Kirk said. "We do not yet have all the facts."

At that point in the conversation, Uhura turned from the communications station. "Admiral Hailey, sir."

"On the main viewer, Lieutenant. Let's hear what he has in store for us," Kirk ordered.

"Main viewer on, sir," Uhura reported as she transferred the signal to the viewscreen that dominated the bridge. The starfield changed to display the

holographic image of the Operational Commander, Admiral Hailey.

"Starfleet to Enterprise," his voice sounded over the speaker. "Enterprise, come in."

"Enterprise to Starfleet - receiving you, sir," Kirk responded, keeping the communication totally formal.

"I'll give this to you straight, Jim. First of all, it would seem that this scientist is completely sane - however, it was common knowledge amongst his staff that he had discovered his family was in some way related to Adolf Hitler."

"My God," McCoy murmured. Spock merely raised his Vulcan eyebrows. Kirk's thoughts were evident in his face; he wasn't going to like this.

"Secondly, the history period he was granted permission to study was Nazi Germany - period, 1939 to 1945."

"But that was the exact period when Earth was in the grip of World War II," McCoy stated worriedly.

"I'm afraid so, Doctor. At the moment, we have no idea of his exact location - Just a minute, Enterprise." The light on the Admiral's desk had begun to flash, indicating that further information was at that moment being fed into the computer. "Something is coming through now. It would appear that our man was studying the theory of Deuterium Oxide distillation." He stumbled over the pronunciation.

"Norway...um...1942, I think it was."

"What, Jim?" It was clear that the Admiral's history and geography were not exactly his most knowledgeable subjects.

"Norway, sir. That's where Germany distilled most of her heavy water."

"Norway? Heavy water?" the Admiral questioned. It was clear to all of them that the Admiral did not know what Kirk was talking about. That makes two of us McCoy thought drily.

"Yes, sir - I believe the more common name for Deuterium Oxide was heavy water - back at that time," Kirk endeavoured to explain.

"Yes, Captain, D₂O was indeed known as heavy water."

"Perhaps you could enlighten us further, Mr. Spock," the Admiral said.

McCoy grimaced. Here we go again, he thought. Another one of Spock's lengthy explanations which he found virtually impossible to understand.

"Certainly, sir. Deuterium Oxide D₂O has specific gravity 1.105 at 25°C, hence the name 'heavy water'. It is present in ordinary water, and can be separated by repeated electrolysis. It was used as a neutron moderator in some types of nuclear reactors, and Germany did experiment with D₂O in her prototype of the fission bomb during 1942." Spock tried to keep the explanation as simple as he could; he did not have a high opinion of Hailey's understanding of scientific matters, able tactician though he undoubtedly was.

"Yes - I see the problem now. Quite apart from his interference with history, if he helps the Germans with the development of the bomb..."

"They win the war," Kirk stated grimly. "But Admiral, why was he studying ancient nuclear fission in the first place?"

"His research was into a cheaper way of supplying power."

"I see...but why heavy water? I thought that was tried, and proved uneconomic, by Canada in the 1970s to 1980s."

"He convinced us that he had developed a simpler method of distillation."

"In that case, what was his point in going through the Time Guardian?"

"There were some advanced discoveries lost when the British bombed the distillation plant at a place called Rujkan; he requested permission to go back to a time before the bombing took place." He looked up from the computer readout. "We agreed."

"The Time Guardian isn't going to be very pleased that the use of his Time Portal has been violated like this."

"Don't worry about the Guardian, Jim - he's already agreed to help all he can. All you have to do is come up with a plan..."

"Thank you, sir."

Kirk's sarcasm went unnoticed. "Stand by to receive all available details; information being relayed now." The Admiral pressed a button on his computer terminal. The Enterprise's central computer confirmed that the information had been received and stored in the memory banks. "Now you know as much as we do, Jim. Good luck. Starfleet out."

Admiral Hailey's image faded and was replaced by the view of the starfield ahead of the ship.

Kirk sat staring at the viewer. He didn't like the situation at all; what plan would work? He must think. Think! The starfield in front of him faded from his consciousness as he made his mind blank; he must clear all other thoughts and problems completely from his mind. This one was going to prove very difficult, and needed a special plan of action.

Meanwhile, behind Kirk's chair, McCoy and Spock were engaged in one of their usual conversational duels.

What happened, Spock? You didn't bombard us with your usual technical jargon."

"There was no point in bewildering those not conversant with ancient nuclear fission, Doctor."

For once McCoy could not think of a suitable reply to Spock's calm, logically irritating statement. Irrked by his inability to come up with a scoring retort, he turned to his Captain. His first glance at Kirk's face told him that his Captain was deep in thought. Kirk was nibbling his lower lip, and his eyes looked faraway.

"Jim, you'd better hold up on the chewing before your bottom lip is reduced to shreds." McCoy's voice cut through Kirk's thoughts as he knew it would. The Captain shook himself and turned to look at his friend. "Well, Jim? What's the plan?"

Kirk grinned, his expression almost boyish. "I'm going to join the Royal Air Force," he stated.

Everyone on the bridge looked at the Captain, their consoles forgotten for the moment. Was this a joke, or could the Captain really be serious?

McCoy was the first to question the Captain's statement. "Do you really mean that, Jim?"

"Yes, Bones, I do."

"I would like to accompany you, Captain, if I may. It would be illogical for you to go alone."

"You realise, Spock, that you would probably cause complete panic amongst the population? One sight of those pointed ears and Vulcan eyebrows would be enough. God help them if you cut yourself! Green blood - ha! Now that really would be the end." McCoy, as usual, was trying to irritate the First Officer.

"Thank you, Doctor. I must admit that I had forgotten your ancestors' pagan myths and legends. I suppose that one could find a likeness between myself and your...devil - I believe that is the correct term."

"Bones is right, I'm afraid, Spock. You just wouldn't be able to hide your Vulcan...attributes on this mission. I'm sorry, but you will have to stay behind and mind the store. You know that if it was possible I would take you with us."

"Yes, Captain, I do know that. Thank you." Spock turned away and moved thoughtfully towards his station.

"You wouldn't be thinking of anything drastic, would you, Spock, like a little ear surgery, eh? And perhaps a transfusion or two?" McCoy had begun jokingly, but he quickly noticed that Spock looked serious. "Now don't you go trying anything stupid! You know as well as I do that your body couldn't stand a transfusion of red blood, what with all your insides being upside down!"

"Thank you, Doctor - I find your concern most gratifying."

The other members of the bridge crew sat at their various stations, the monitors giving each individual a complete picture of the ship's functions and condition temporarily forgotten. The conversation between the ship's Doctor and First Officer was far more interesting. The nearest members of the Bridge crew were finding it difficult to suppress their smiles, for they all knew that the First Officer would indeed try anything if it would enable him to accompany the Captain.

"And I, Spock, find your conceit nothing unusual," McCoy stated, glaring at the object of his annoyance.

For the first time in his life, Jim Kirk found that McCoy's comments were getting on his nerves. Usually it did not worry him - it even amused him - but just at the moment... Thinking about it, he presumed it stemmed from the fact that Spock would be unable to accompany him on the mission.

Kirk's thoughts were curtailed abruptly when he caught the gist of McCoy's last statement. Spock having a blood transfusion...ear operation? Turning slightly in his chair Kirk could see the look in Spock's eyes. It was time to stop this conversation before it developed into something more than mere talk.

"Shut up, Bones." Kirk glared at his C.M.O. "It's bad enough having to leave Spock behind without you rubbing it in."

McCoy immediately realised his mistake. In a situation like this Spock could be very unpredictable; if there was a remote possibility that the things he had mentioned could work, then Spock would try them. He would do nearly anything to be where his Captain needed him.

"Sorry." McCoy looked towards Spock.

"You have my apologies also, Captain." Spock turned towards his computer console; the thoughts he was experiencing were unbecoming to a Vulcan. It would be illogical for him even to consider what McCoy had just mentioned. Yet the idea, far-fetched though it seemed, had a certain amount of logic to it. Spock knew, however, that to put arguments forward to the Captain along those lines would be useless; he knew that Kirk would not agree, would do nothing that might endanger Spock's life merely to satisfy his own needs.

Satisfied that he could now get a word in, Kirk stood. "Right, gentlemen, if we are going to be successful I suggest we get down to some work now. Bones, you and Scotty set up a flight simulator in the sickbay."

On hearing his name mentioned, Scott turned from the Engineering console, his attention caught by the mention of constructing a flight simulator; the slight mechanical fault on the console forgotten. Did Kirk really say 'flight simulator'? Looking intrigued, he questioned the statement with his eyes. "Sir?"

It dawned on Kirk that mentioning the flight simulator had been the key factor in drawing the Chief Engineer's attention away from his task of locating the reported mechanical fault in the auxiliary engineering console. "Scotty, how long will it take you to set up a flight simulator in sickbay?" Kirk rephrased

his original question.

Scott moved swiftly to his Captain's side. "A simulator's straightforward to set up - I don't see any problem in constructing it as long as there's room in sickbay for it."

Kirk had listened intently, breathing a sigh of relief when it became clear that Scott could handle this; all of Kirk's careful planning could have been lost so easily if his Chief Engineer had seen a problem with a simulator.

"However, the whole thing will need to be linked up to the main computer, and that's what will take the time, sir - it's a delicate job."

"Thank you, Scotty." Kirk turned his attention to his Vulcan First Officer. Taking the three steps to the upper level in one bound, he stopped directly behind the science officer's console. Spock at that precise moment was concentrating on the information the computer was providing.

"Spock." Kirk spoke softly, not wanting to distract the Vulcan from the message he was receiving.

"Yes, Captain." The computer had completed its message, and Spock turned to face his friend.

"Can you link up the main computer to the simulator?" Immediately, Kirk wished he could unsay the sentence - of course Spock could do that! He felt stupid for asking.

"Yes, it should present only a minor interruption in the ship's routine." Spock gave no indication that he considered the question anything other than routine. "However, there is one problem."

It took a moment for the last statement to sink in. "What problem?" Kirk asked, unable to control the look of disbelief on his face.

"The programming, sir. Unless I know the exact type of craft you will be requiring to fly, the computer cannot comply with your wishes. Also it may be a possibility that the correct craft's flying mannerisms are not held in our computer banks."

"I hope it is, Spock, or the whole plan will crumble into dust. Input Lancaster Bombers, please."

Kirk literally held his breath as he waited for the reply from the computer. This situation had, indeed, never crossed his mind.

When the reply came, Spock read it over carefully. Kirk, impatient as ever, could hold his curiosity no longer. "Well?" he demanded.

"There should be no problem, Captain, the computer appears to hold all the information required."

"Good." Kirk smiled, relieved that the one thing that could have foiled his plan had not turned into reality. "All right - Scotty, Fones, get on with it," he said as he turned, to see the Engineer and Doctor still on the bridge.

"On our way, Jim," McCoy responded, heading for the turbolift, closely followed by Scott. Satisfied that the simulator would be ready by evening, Kirk returned to his command chair. Settling himself down in the black leather, he let himself relax for the first time since the communication from Starfleet had notified him of this mission. Spock, on the other hand, was certainly not satisfied, for it was clear that the Captain intended to be in the thick of the danger. His request for the simulator indicated that it was his intention to be the pilot of a Lancaster, and Spock realised that that would be no easy task to perform especially when under fire. Spock felt it necessary to question the Captain on his ability to fly such a craft. Stepping down to the lower level of the bridge, Spock moved to the side of the command chair.

"Captain, do you intend to be the pilot of a Lancaster?" Spock asked, his

concern evident in his voice.

Kirk turned to face his First Officer. He knew Spock was worried and he tried to indicate complete confidence in his own abilities in his reply. "Yes, Spock, I do."

"May I remind you, sir, that flying a shuttlecraft is totally different from flying a World War II bomber." Spock's face did not alter as he spoke; the note of concern was gone. Had it really been there, or had Kirk imagined it?

"Believe me, Spock, I do know that it is very different, but I am the only qualified aeroplane pilot on the Enterprise, and that, I believe, makes me the obvious choice." For a moment Kirk thought he had made his point, but no -- Spock was not about to accept that statement without a further explanation. "I think I'd better tell you why - it might stop you worrying."

"Please do, Captain." It was a measure of how worried Spock was that he did not deny the emotion.

Kirk took a deep breath before he began; for some reason the whole bridge crew seemed unusually attentive to what he was about to say - and that had to be his imagination, he told himself. Every head was bent industriously over its console. "When I was a child, my grandfather's main interest was in old flying machines, and one of his greatest achievements was the reconstruction of an old American Dakota, which was similar to the British Lancaster." Kirk hoped that that was explanation enough.

"That does not explain your certainty that you can fly it," Spock persisted.

"Well, having put the plane together, grandfather decided that instead of having it lying around the farm collecting dust, he'd put it to good use. So he converted the bomb bay into a spraying bay, and used it to spray the crops. He taught me how to fly it." Kirk sincerely hoped that that would satisfy his First Officer, but he was wrong.

"How old were you?"

"Around fourteen or fifteen." Kirk glanced suspiciously at the Vulcan. "What difference does it make when I learned to fly it?"

"It may be the difference between life and death, Captain."

"Doubts, Spock?"

"Yes," Spock replied, inclining his head.

"Oh." Kirk was taken aback by Spock's directness. It called for a change of subject. Swivelling the command chair round, he gestured with his arm. "How many crew were required in a Lancaster, Spock?" As the First Officer moved back to his console to check the information, he added, "I think it was seven or eight, but I'm not sure which."

"Both, as it happens, Captain."

Kirk looked slightly puzzled. "Explain."

"Until the spring of 1942, the Lancaster carried eight crew, including a co-pilot. However, to economise on aircrew, it was decided that the flight engineer should double up as second pilot, therefore reducing the number in the crew to seven."

"I see. So - if I'm not mistaken - the crew would comprise pilot, co-pilot, flight engineer, navigator, wireless operator, bomb aimer, nose gunner, mid-upper gunner and tail gunner. No, that can't be right, that makes nine - so who doubled up?" Kirk was thinking out loud.

"The bomb aimer and nose gunner, sir." As usual it was Spock who provided the information.

"All right, Spock - let's have the computer's recommendations." Kirk knew

the Vulcan would have the relevant information ready, and he smiled to himself as Spock turned towards him immediately.

"The computer for once agrees with you, Captain."

Kirk drew his eyebrows down, unable to think what Spock meant.

"It suggests you for pilot," Spock went on. "Mr. Scott for flight engineer, Lt. David Tyson for radio operator, Lt. Tom Davidson for navigator." The grin on Chekov's face faded; he had hoped that the computer would give his name and not that of his chief. Meanwhile Spock was completing the list. "Lt. John Keller, bomb aimer/gunner; other gunners, Commander Paul Jones, Lt. David Smith. The computer suggests that a co-pilot should not be required."

Kirk wasted no time. Turning towards his communications officer, he said, "Contact all these officers immediately, Uhura, and ask them to attend a briefing at 0900 tomorrow; also inform Dr. McCoy that I will require his presence as well."

"Yes, Captain." Uhura turned back to her console, and just as quickly turned back. "Captain."

"Yes?"

"Dr. McCoy is contacting you."

Kirk turned his attention back to his own direct communications panel on the arm of the command chair. "Kirk here." He pressed the switch down.

"Jim, the simulator's set up. All it needs is for Spock to connect it up to the main computer. Sickbay out."

Dr. McCoy added the final touches to the performance monitor in the small room that Scotty had chosen to set the simulator up in. It stood in the opposite corner from the door, and took up most of the floor space. One thing McCoy was glad about was that this was only a refresher course, not a full training programme; there just wouldn't have been enough time to train Kirk from scratch.

Kirk entered, just ahead of Spock, who immediately busied himself checking over the computer terminal. Kirk moved further into the room and stopped behind McCoy. "Is it ready, Pones?" he asked as calmly as he could; the thought of flying an aeroplane again, even in simulation, was exhilarating.

McCoy jumped, dropping the small sonic screwdriver he was holding. "Now look what you've made me do," he complained frostily.

"What did I do?" Kirk asked, frowning down at the bent figure of the Doctor.

"I'll never find it in here!" McCoy muttered as he dropped to his knees to search amongst the mounds of cable covering the floor.

"What are you looking for?" Kirk dropped onto one knee beside McCoy.

"A small sonic screwdriver, blast it!"

"What on earth were you doing with a screwdriver?" Kirk suppressed a chuckle. It was so unlike McCoy to use anything other than medical equipment. Just then, Kirk noticed, out of the corner of his eye, a small glint of light shining just beneath a tangle of wire. "Is this what you're looking for?" He handed the Doctor the small silver object.

"Yes." McCoy took the screwdriver from Kirk and quickly finished adjusting the minute screw in the back of the medical monitor that would record all the body readings he would need to study afterwards. Once that was done, he turned to Kirk. "It's all ready for you, Jim - but go easy, will you?"

Kirk smiled. "I always go easy."

"Who are you trying to kid?" McCoy looked reprovingly at his Captain.

"I take it you heard what happened to the simulator at the Academy," Kirk said, almost sheepishly, as he opened the door of the simulator.

"Yes - well, you know as well as I do how gossip travels. But Jim - you know that to repeat your...enthusiasm here could endanger the mission even before it begins - but more importantly, you would disable the Enterprise."

"Don't worry, Bones - I'll be very careful." Kirk's expression was serious. His hand grasped the handle of the door so tightly that his knuckles showed white.

"You'd better," McCoy said, equally seriously. "Just let the computer take you through the programme first, then you can handle it yourself."

"Fine by me," Kirk had to agree.

"Captain. Doctor."

McCoy turned to face the owner of the voice. "Something wrong?" he queried.

"No. The computer link-up is complete. I merely wished to say that I will be on the bridge if you require me for anything." Spock left the two men alone, his thoughts elsewhere as he strode down the corridor to the turbolift.

Kirk wasted no time. He entered the simulator silently, feeling a little apprehensive; he hoped things would be just as he remembered.

He need not have worried, for all the controls, dials and switches were more or less where he remembered them to be. Quietly he sat in the pilot's seat, savouring the sensation that came over him.

Come on, Jim, you're behaving like a schoolboy with a new toy, he told himself. Placing the headphones comfortably across the top of his head, he reached up with his right hand and clipped the oxygen mask across his face. He remembered that the microphone which enabled the crew to communicate with each other was situated on the front of the mask. He fingered the switch absentmindedly as he gazed at the controls in front of him. The butterflies returned to his stomach as his excitement grew. Pulling himself together, he flicked on the four ignition switches, which were situated above his head. The special effects were amazingly real. As the four engines 'caught', he could actually feel the vibration of the four Rolls Royce Merlins - even the roar of the build-up penetrated the headphones. The Lancaster's flying speed was 275 mph, he remembered. He pushed the four throttles forward evenly; the holograph in front of him showed the runway dead ahead. To all intents and purposes the plane was taxiing towards the main runway. Kirk depressed the left rudder pedal with his foot, engaging the flaps, at the same time turning the plane onto the main runway. Increasing the revs, throttles pushed further and further forward, the speed increasing, Kirk could feel the need of the craft to leave the earth. Pulling the yoke back steadily, he had the sensation of the plane leaving the ground to soar into the air. Pressing the communications switch, he spoke directly to McCoy.

"It's nearly as good as the real thing, Bones." He was handling the simulator with ease, the graceful movements of his hands showing clearly that he was enjoying himself. He knew that he would have enjoyed himself even more if the programme had included a few aerobatics - however, he doubted that the R.A.F. would find such tomfoolery acceptable.

A buzzer sounded somewhere in the simulator, indicating that the programme was nearly at its end and that it was time for Kirk to land. With a sigh, he lowered the landing gear, changed the heading of the aircraft and began his descent. Full flaps...throttle back...reduce air speed gently...lower and lower, until with a slight bump the wheels were down and the plane was once again taxiing to its stopping point. Kirk knew that Spock would be monitoring his performance on the main computer, and briefly wondered how he had scored. Then, closing down the engines he pulled off his face mask and headphones.

McCoy paced the floor back and forth several times in the twenty or so minutes that Kirk had been in the simulator. He had also been monitoring the

Captain, but his sphere was not how Kirk had handled the plane but how Kirk's body had handled the pressure of flying the plane. The only thing that McCoy could fault was that Kirk was excited, and acting like a little boy - except that his toy was rather dangerous. If he was acting like this now, what would he be like flying the real thing?

Kirk stepped out of the simulator and came face to face with McCoy.

"I told you to let the computer take you through the programme before you attempted it yourself." McCoy could not allow his friend to get away without at least that reminder. "Jim, this is no game. Your life, and the lives of your crew, depend on you. Like it or not, you could end up dead - I know I'm good, but I can't perform miracles."

"I know, Bones, but - "

"No buts, Jim - I mean what I say. Tomorrow we'll add some extras to the programme - and tomorrow, do what you're told and let the computer do it first!"

"Yes, sir," the Enterprise Captain replied as he stood to attention, a gleam of mischief in his eyes.

"It's no joke, Jim." McCoy looked more worried than angry. It was clear to Kirk that his friend had deep misgivings about this mission and his own ability to cope with the situation.

"You need a drink," Kirk suggested with a smile.

"What I need is my head examined for agreeing to this charade."

"So you don't want a drink?"

"There's a difference between what I want and what I need," McCoy growled.

Kirk grinned. "Right - let's go to my quarters, and you can help yourself while I shower and change."

Lt. Commander Scott entered the briefing room at exactly 0859. As usual, he was expounding about his beloved engines to Lt. John Keller, who had had to suffer hearing about their intricate workings all the way up in the turbolift. As they took their seats at the conference table, the room fell silent; Kirk stood in the doorway, Spock and McCoy behind him. As he entered, the men present stood to attention. The three officers moved to their customary seats.

"Please be seated."

As soon as everyone was settled, Kirk began to explain the situation. "You are all no doubt wondering at the reason for this briefing. Starfleet Command has a rather unusual job for us, involving a certain amount of danger. Yes, I know that many of our missions do involve danger, but this is no ordinary mission, as it involves going back in time. You have all been chosen to participate because of your specific jobs, but if any of you prefer not to volunteer for such a hazardous assignment you are at liberty to say so and drop out now." Kirk waited a few moments before continuing. "With the help of the Time Guardian we hope to retrieve from the 1940s a renegade Starfleet scientist who is helping the Germans to develop the fission bomb.

"The plan is simple. We will be - apparently - a Royal Air Force aircrew newly assigned to a base in the north of Scotland." Kirk let what he had just said sink in before he continued to outline his plan. "The scientist is, as far as we know, at present working at a heavy water plant in a place called Rjukan-falls, in Norway..."

At last Kirk found himself at the last item on the agenda. "All right, gentlemen -- please report to the quartermaster to be measured up for your R.A.F. uniforms. Any questions? Dismissed."

Back in Kirk's cabin, McCoy sat eyeing the uniform of a R.A.F. officer which lay across the Captain's bunk. Something was puzzling him. Of course! It contained underwear as well as a shirt, jacket, trousers, socks and shoes.

"You'll never get into all that! I mean, where do you start?" McCoy questioned as Kirk handed him a drink.

"It was all made to measure, Bones," Kirk replied as he sipped his own drink.

"Perhaps you had better try it on. It doesn't look quite right to me."

Kirk stared at the uniform. "You're right, it does look kind of funny." He smiled as he hauled off his Starfleet uniform top. The wedgewood blue shirt of the R.A.F. took its place.

"Who took these measurements?" McCoy wanted to know as he eyed the shirt tails that covered the Captain's backside.

"The quartermaster. Why? It's not tight."

"No, but the shirt doesn't seem to know when to end." McCoy's head moved up and down in a sweeping inspection.

"I'm sure they know every detail of the uniform - the computer in stores is very comprehensively programmed. I doubt they'd make a mistake in detail, Bones."

"Then let's see you in all of it, Jim."

Kirk removed his own uniform trousers. The first thing he put on was the underpants, immediately followed by the trousers.

"These damn things itch!" Kirk grimaced and began to wriggle.

"Better get used to it, Jim," McCoy grinned ruefully.

"You really know how to comfort someone in their hour of need," Kirk moaned as he pulled on the jacket.

"You don't look bad, Jim - in fact, you look quite smart." He considered the air force uniform for a moment; and an unwelcome memory edged its way into his consciousness. "One thing, though."

"What?"

"I don't want you coming back moping over leaving some darn female." He noticed the flash of pain despite the speed with which Kirk hid it, and knew that his statement had reopened the old wound. But if that old memory prevented Jim from making the same sort of mistake again, it was worth it.

"Point taken, Bones. I've no intention of letting history repeat itself - not in that way, anyway."

"I shouldn't have said that, should I?"

"No, Bones, you're right; I can't afford to get involved with anyone, there's too much at stake. Anyway, I don't think I could do what I did to Edith again...watching her die, knowing that I could have saved her..."

"Scotty and I will just have to keep a close eye on you, but if you lock up that darn charm of yours we should get through all right."

"Oh? And who's going to keep you two out of trouble?" Kirk looked up sharply, suddenly realising what McCoy had just said. "Who said I was taking you along?"

"I did. You don't think you'll manage without your friendly family doctor, do you?"

"Well..."

"I'm going, Jim. You might just need medical attention that the 1940s can't give you. Don't worry, I'll be careful."

"I can see all three of us landing in the...what was it called? Oh, yes, the guardhouse."

"Not if I can help it!"

"Especially since we won't have Spock to bail us out."

Just two days after the briefing, the selected landing party took their places on the transporter platform, McCoy as usual grumbling as he stepped onto his station. "Why am I always included in these things, I signed aboard to practice medicine not to go hopping about the cosmos getting my atoms scrambled by this thing!"

"You are included, Bones, because you told me you were coming in case your skill was needed," Kirk reminded him. "Energise."

"Me and my big mou..." McCoy's statement was lost in the hum of the transporter.

The first five, Kirk, Spock, McCoy, Scott and Keller, materialised in a small room. It was lucky that none of them was exceptionally tall, because the ceiling gave them only an inch or so clearance above their heads. The reason for the lack of head room became obvious as the Guardian came into view. He was small - only some three and a half feet tall. He was wrinkled with age and completely bald. He held his hand out to greet the Captain as an equal.

"Captain Kirk, it's good to see you. I received a call from Starfleet giving me the details of what you want to do, and I can indeed help you. The man you are looking for requested permission to go back to December 1941, location Norway on planet Earth. The reason for the request was to study heavy water distillation procedures, in connection with a project he was researching."

The rapidity with which the Guardian was answering his unasked questions did not surprise Kirk, for he knew of the alien's ability to read one's mind.

"We do not wish to alter Time any further than has already been done," Kirk said. "Therefore it is necessary -"

"Yes, I know. I have programmed the Time Portal for Scotland, January 1942. Until that time he did indeed merely observe, but you will not have much time before he begins to make suggestions," the Guardian commented as the remainder of the landing party materialised in the background. "Your party will report to R.A.F. Blackhill; you will be expected. That is all I can do for you. The success of the mission depends on you."

"Yes, sir, - I know," Kirk replied.

The Guardian pointed behind Kirk; Spock raised his eyebrows as the finger levelled directly at him. "I am sorry, but the Vulcan cannot go."

"I am well aware of that fact, sir. Commander Spock is here on Starfleet orders," Kirk explained.

"My apologies for doubting your good sense, Captain. Now if you would kindly take your places?" He indicated a circular platform that was similar to the transporter of the Enterprise.

"Here we go again," McCoy grumbled as he took his position.

The Guardian sat at the controls and pressed several keys, lifting his hand in a gesture of farewell. The effect of the machine was similar to that of the familiar transporter; they shimmered and faded. Spock watched them go.

"Good luck, Jim," he murmured quietly.

With the landing party on its way, Spock thanked the Guardian, flipped open his communicator and requested transport back aboard the Enterprise.

* * * * *

NORWAY 1942

The glistening snow-packed slopes of the village of Rjukan had witnessed years of fun and laughter, of family joy and the sheer feeling of being free. Now all the villagers saw were black marching boots, firing squads and white snow stained with red blood. The morning bustle was no longer full of happy workers, just subdued watchful people who feared to think out loud, for Norway was an occupied country. The Germans had come to Rjukan because of the hydro plant that overlooked the village; it was ideal for the production of the heavy water they so desperately needed to develop for the hydrogen bomb. This was to be the ultimate weapon in their war with Britain; their rockets would cover the country and lay it waste in days. The project had the highest security possible, but that did not stop the Norwegian Resistance from discovering the whole plot and passing the information on to the intelligence officers in Britain, who began to set the wheels in motion to try to stop the plant from becoming fully operational.

Professor Hans Wiseman watched from his office window as the workers peddalled their bikes into the factory grounds. It was early morning and the snow wore a reddish cloak as if it were dressing for the day in a mantle of glorious colour. The rap of knuckles on his office door brought him back to reality.

"Come!" he called, frowning.

The door opened, and the Station Commandant, who had been in Berlin for the last two days, entered the office quickly. His cold blue eyes took everything in at a glance; the remains of a hastily eaten meal balanced on a tray perched on the corner of the desk, a cup of cold coffee left forgotten and mounds of paper-work that lay in confusion over the rest of the desk top.

"Well, Professor, I see you have been working all night again. The Fuhrer will be exceptionally pleased with your devotion to duty."

Wiseman looked up at the Commandant from his seat on the windowsill. He had no intention of jumping at every snap of a German finger, but he did wonder what was going through Fischer's mind.

"As you know, I have just returned from a meeting with the Fuhrer himself, and he is delighted at your progress."

Fischer's uniform bore the two distinctive flashes of the S.S., and his cap had the death's head badge pinned above its peak. When he had first been sent to Rjukan, Fischer had thought it was a punishment for some unmentionable crime he had unwittingly committed, but now his thoughts were elsewhere, as this post definitely had possibilities. After all, had he not just had an interview with the Fuhrer? Fischer could almost smell the promotion now.

Watching the smug smile on Fischer's face, Wiseman shook his head, for he knew exactly what ought to happen; but he had no intention of letting history repeat itself.

"What is he saying to my recommendations?" Wiseman demanded.

"There will be a full company of S.S. troops arriving within twenty one days."

"That is good, for we will be up to full production shortly after that. Nothing, but nothing, must happen to this plant between now and then. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Herr Professor. Now if you will excuse me, I have work to do."

Wiseman dismissed the German Army officer with a curt nod of his head. He wondered briefly what Hitler would say if he, Hans Fredrick Wiseman, was to tell them just who he was. No. He pushed that thought down. If they found out that he was not who he seemed to be, they would have him shot in spite of his usefulness as if he were an ordinary spy; they might even ignore his suggestions! Time to think about telling the truth after Germany won the war...when his part in the glorious victory could not be doubted...

SCOTLAND 1942

The dark entrance of the country railway station had never before received travellers in such an unusual way, but these were extreme times. Most travellers arrived by car or bicycle or just plain walking, but shimmering, twinkling lights were a new one to Fred Bain in spite of all the people he had seen come and go for the last thirty years or so. He had been due for retirement just as the war broke out, so he now found himself in sole charge of Longedge Station, somewhere in Scotland.

"Now that's a canny wee flashlight you young fellows got there."

Kirk and his crew turned at the sound of a voice coming from behind them. Standing in a halo of light, Fred looked the epitome of a station master; his railway uniform looked immaculate - if a little threadbare - and the pocket watch he was studying was obviously made of silver. His greying hair was brushed back neatly. Fred had been station master, porter and ticket collector since his two young assistants had left to join the forces; as an old campaigner himself, his only regret had been that he was too old to go with them.

Kirk smiled at the old man and at the same time held out his hand in welcome. "Hello. We were wondering where everyone was. You see, our transport broke down a mile or so up the road, and we have to report to our new station tomorrow morning." Jim Kirk grinned at the old man even more broadly. "Could you tell us when you expect the next train through, please?"

"Aye. Well, that depends on where you want to go."

"Walls have ears, you know," Scott piped up from behind Kirk. "You canna expect us to tell a complete stranger where we're going."

"An' I dinna ken who you are either, for that matter. You could be some of them Jerry spies we keep hearing about."

"Point taken," said the Captain. "Let's begin again. I'm Squadron Leader Kirk, and this cantankerous Scot is Flight Lieutenant Scott, my flight engineer. You can check our ID cards if you like."

Fred liked the open, friendly face of the one called Kirk. He was what you would consider an unstanding young man should be - at least, in his day you would.

"Aye. Well, I dinna think we need go that far. You'd best come in and I'll make some tea - it'll be weak, though; with all the rationing I can only use a spoon or two a day."

"That'll be just fine," Kirk replied for them all. It was then that he noticed that McCoy was missing. He made a mental note to mention it to Scott once they were alone. He had his own views on the matter; no doubt Bones would turn up later.

While the tea did not exactly have much taste, at least it was warm and wet. The small office was very cramped with the eight of them huddled round the open fire. Fred surveyed the flight crew and made a snap decision.

"If you're looking for a place to stay the night you'll no' find any accomodation around about here, and there's no train through till the morning. But you're welcome to stay in the waiting room for the night."

"Thank you very much. That's very kind of you." David Tyson, the radio operator, spoke his first words in that century.

"Aye. Well, it's the least I can do for you. You'll find blankets in the cupboard. Now if you've finished your tea I'll show you the waiting room, and I'll stoke the fire up for the night so you'll be warm." Fred Bain led the way to the waiting room, stoked the fire up and bade them goodnight.

Once they were alone, Kirk spoke. "Well, gentlemen, apart from Dr. McCoy we all seem to have arrived safely. No doubt he will be waiting for us at the station."

"He'll be there," Scott said with a confidence that Kirk hoped was not misplaced.

"So shall we bed down for the night." Kirk looked around the room. The fire burning in the hearth made the room feel reasonably warm, although the thought of sleeping on the wooden seats that were situated along the walls did nothing to bring sleep to their eyes.

"Aye, Captain, that's a good idea," Scott replied as the rest of the crew helped themselves to bedding. "I might even find time to work out one or two of the little problems that I know they had with Lancasters in the beginning. I'm sure I can iron them out."

"As always, Scotty, if you can't get your hands on an engine, you're thinking of one. Just watch that any improvements you come up with are feasible for the technology of the time. Oh, and try to remember to call me by my 'proper' title - I'm supposed to be a Squadron Leader. The R.A.F. didn't have the rank of Captain, so it's either the full title or just Jim - we don't want to be suspected of being spies. That goes for all of you," he added, looking round. "Aircrews often tended to the informal with each other, so you'd maybe better all get used to thinking of me as Jim."

"Aye, Cap - Jim," Scott replied. The pair, who had been friends for many years, grinned at each other across the room.

The light dimmed, they all settled down for the night, each one going over the specific job outlined for him in the briefing before they left the Enterprise. Soon, the quietness was broken only by the occasional snore and someone's heavy breathing.

The whistle of the train brought all seven men out onto the platform next morning. The sight of the great engine belching out steam from either side and the squeal of its brakes were something no engineer from the future could ignore, especially when his name was Montgomery Scott.

"Och, I'd love to get my hands on that beauty! What I could do to improve it if only I had time..."

"Scotty, I don't think we would be too popular with the other passengers - or the engine driver - if you started taking the thing apart now," Dave Tyson chuckled.

Scott looked horrified. "Dinna call such a fine piece of machinery a thing! You've got no heart."

Kirk and Fred Bain stepped out onto the platform behind them. "As this is our train, gentlemen, I think we should step aboard before we are left stranded again." Kirk turned to the old stationmaster. "Thank you for your hospitality, Fred, we appreciated it." He shook the old man's hand warmly.

"Aye. Well. Think nothing of it, Jim. Take care of yourselves, and good luck."

With a general murmured thanks to Fred, they all boarded the waiting train and on finding an empty compartment they made themselves comfortable. The train began to pull out of the station, steam building up; it gathered speed and rattled away round the bend. Fred watched the train go and as it disappeared from sight he turned back to sweeping the platform. People came and went...

* * * * *

Spock reflected on the events of the last hour. There was nothing he could do now but wait. He did not know how long the mission would take nor how long his Captain would be away; time passes at different rates in different dimensions. It might take Kirk a day in 'real' time, or a week. The success or failure of the

mission lay in Kirk's hands; Spock did not allow himself, however, to think of failure, that Kirk might never come back. But the waiting would not be easy.

"From Starship to Lancaster." Spock spoke his thoughts out loud.

Uhura turned from her station, unsure if she had heard the First Officer correctly. "Sir?"

Spock raised his elegant Vulcan eyebrows. "From Starship to Lancaster, Miss Uhura," he repeated. "I was merely speaking my thoughts."

Sulu turned from his helm console. "There's a big difference, sir."

"Quite correct, Mr. Sulu - there is."

"Think they can pull it off, sir?" Chekov asked innocently.

Spock refused to rise to the bait. It was Uhura who answered. "Chekov, if anyone can pull it off, the Captain can. Right, Mr. Spock?"

"I hope so." Spock for once had let his feelings show to the junior crew; they realised, possibly for the first time, how worried Spock was about the mission and Jim Kirk's safety.

"You have doubts, sir?" Chekov sounded shocked as he questioned Spock's statement.

"I did not say that," Spock responded quickly. "It would be illogical to underestimate Captain Kirk's ability...but it would be equally illogical to deny the seriousness of the situation."

The whooshing of the turbolift door drew his attention. As he turned, to see the ship's Head Nurse step out onto the bridge, a clipboard clasped firmly in her right hand. "Mr. Spock, I've just finished checking through the medical supplies - the standard monthly check," Chapel reported as she stepped into the well of the bridge.

"You have found a discrepancy?" Spock could see from the look on her face that something definitely was wrong.

"Yes. We'll be requisitioning new supplies from Starbase 12, but we must be able to account for all items used, and that's the problem; I can't."

"What is missing?"

"According to records, we had seven full field medical kits. One was used last month, so we should have six; but I can only find five in the supplies unit."

"Interesting." Spock spoke thoughtfully.

"The kit isn't the only thing, there are a number of small items I can't account for, but they could all be 'lost' in general reports. The kit can't."

"Let me see the list." Spock took the clipboard she offered him. After reading through the missing items, he looked at her. "Have you no theory to explain why these things should be missing?"

"But sir, if Dr. McCoy is caught with any advanced medical equipment, it could blow their cover." It was clear she was worried.

"You have a valid point, Nurse, but I cannot see Dr. McCoy risking the mission - he knows the situation and I do not think he would do anything to jeopardise it, but it would certainly appear that the good Doctor has taken some insurance with him." Somehow he did not think it prudent to add his certainty that if Jim Kirk's life was at stake, McCoy would go to Hell and back to save him even if it did mean blowing the whole mission wide open...and in the privacy of his own thoughts, he knew that he would not blame him for it, would indeed be grateful to him for it.

"But Mr. Spock, you know that if the Captain's life is at risk, Dr. McCoy would..." Christine Chapel also knew the Doctor.

"Yes, Nurse, I do - however, I do not think it will come to that; after all, Captain Kirk is an accomplished pilot."

Christine Chapel was not convinced, but she knew it was useless to pursue the argument further, and Uhura's timely announcement that Starfleet H.Q. wished to speak to Mr. Spock saved her further embarrassment. Christine knew that she had handled the situation badly.

Spock asked Uhura to transfer the call to his quarters, and, leaving Sulu the con, left the bridge. After the turbolift doors had closed behind the First Officer, Uhura looked at Chapel with some concern. "Are you all right, Chris?"

"I guess I chose the wrong moment to tell him about the missing supplies," Chapel shrugged.

"No moment would be right until the Captain is back safely," Uhura smiled. "You know what Spock's like."

"Yes, I know - and frankly, I'm worried."

"About Spock?"

"Yes. It hit him harder than we will admit, not being able to go with them."

"I'll keep an eye on him," Uhura promised. "Now you'd better be off before he comes back and wonders why you're still here."

"You're right. I'm off!" Chapel took the three steps in one, and headed for the turbolift.

Sulu turned the command chair round to face Uhura. "You'd make someone a good wife, Uhura," he smiled approvingly.

* * * * *

As the steam train pulled slowly into Longside station, Kirk was thinking of their arrival at R.A.F. Blackhill. He was hoping that the Guardian, as promised, had managed to include their names on the list of personnel posted there.

"There should be a driver to meet us, and the other extra personnel they asked for, so let's go and find him," he ordered as the train finally stopped.

The carriage door swung easily open as the men stepped out onto the platform, which was steadily filling with airmen. Kirk looked about, and was surprised to find that he was in fact the senior officer present. A young aircraftman came smartly to attention in front of Kirk, and saluted him. Kirk returned the salute, thankful that Starfleet's salute was the same as this much older one, and that formality was retained at the Academy, at least.

"Squadron Leader Kirk?"

"Yes - are you our transport?"

"Yes, sir. If I could have everyone's names to check the arrival's list?"

"By all means." He ran through the names of his crew and the aircraftman ticked them off. There was a short delay while all the other names were also checked, then the aircraftman led them to their transport.

It turned out to be a three-ton truck, quite different from the sort of transport they were used to. They followed the actions of the other relief crews and climbed aboard, flinging their kitbags to the back of the truck, and with a roar the engine started and they set off up the road.

The journey from the station to the camp was only about three miles, but to the time travellers it was three miles too far. Not only was it uncomfortable and noisy in the back of the lorry, it was also a very cold January morning in the North of Scotland.

The gates of the camp were well guarded, as was to be expected. The two sentries came to attention as they saw Kirk among the officers jumping from the truck.

"Good morning, sir, I hope you had a good trip up here."

The voice belonged to the Station Warrant Officer, who approached Kirk and saluted. "Group Captain Crompton's compliments, sir. He would like to see you - if you would follow me?"

"Thank you, Mr...?" Kirk remembered that a Warrant Officer was always addressed as 'Mister'. It was always a good idea to make friends with the man who, as far as the airmen were concerned, ran the camp; he gave the Warrant Officer the smile that had won over even his unemotional Vulcan friend.

"Bowman, sir - Andrew Bowman."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Bowman." Glancing at his crew, he said, "I'll see you later in our quarters. Get yourselves settled in. Take over, Scotty."

"Aye, sir. Right, let's get off, then." Scotty turned to the young Corporal. "Where's our billet, lad?"

"This way, sir." He led them away.

The Warrant Officer led Kirk to the H.Q. building which was situated at the centre of a crescent of other small brick offices. The R.A.F. flag stood at the top of the mast; below it lay the small triangular pennant with a single thick red stripe running horizontally across it which belonged to the Group Captain and flew only when he was on the station. The flags were fluttering in the slight breeze, the halyard slapping stiffly against the mast making a slight twanging sound.

Kirk took all this in as he walked towards the main entrance with Bowman. Arriving at the C.O.'s door, Bowman knocked twice; a voice from within bade them enter. Both men entered the hallowed portals where most men feared to tread - unless they had very clear consciences.

"Ah, Squadron Leader Kirk. Glad you arrived safely. Crompton's the name - I'm sure you and I will get on famously."

"Yes, sir. Thank you very much." Kirk came to attention in front of the desk.

Crompton studied him for a moment. "We'll get down to work in the morning - you can have today to get settled in." The C.O.'s attention switched to the Warrant Officer. "Mr. Bowman."

"Sir."

"Show Squadron Leader Kirk to his billet."

"Sir."

"Kirk, you and your crew are scheduled for medicals first thing in the morning. Mr. Bowman will show you round the camp; anything you want to know, you can ask him."

"Yes, sir."

Walking with the Warrant Officer towards his billet, Kirk found himself hoping that McCoy had also arrived safely. Still, if the medicals were first thing tomorrow, then he must have arrived before them. Pushing his concern for McCoy to the back of his mind, Kirk decided to ask Bowman some of the questions that a new officer would be sure to ask, if not for himself, on behalf of his crew.

"Tell me, Mr. Bowman, is there any special place around here that the aircrew can use for relaxation, other than the mess?"

"Why, yes, sir - there's the local public house in the village - that's not out of bounds, and the barman's quite friendly."

"Any reason why I shouldn't take my crew out for a drink tonight?" Kirk went on as they arrived at his quarters.

"None, sir."

Kirk nodded his thanks to the Warrant Officer and went into his billet. Once he had found his way around the hut, he made his way to the rest room where he found his men in a tight cluster around the open fire, talking over the events that had already occurred since their departure from the Enterprise. Kirk, coming up behind them unobserved, was pleased to hear that they were referring to the ship as if she was their last station.

"Well, gentlemen, it would appear that we are due for our medicals first thing in the morning; until then our time is our own. What do you say to a sociable evening out? I've been told there's a very good public house in the village which is not off limits."

"Yes, sir!" "We're with you, sir!" Several voices echoed in assent.

"Aye, sir - I could just do with a wee dram to warm myself up." Scott could almost see the golden liquid and taste the 'water of life' that was his preferred drink.

"Right, then. Let's see if we can find some transport, shall we?" Kirk headed for the door, the rest of his crew following. Outside, they stopped to survey their surroundings.

It was the Captain who saw the bicycles first. They were leaning against the side of the hut; there was nobody around to ask who they belonged to, but they were the obvious answer to the transport problem. Kirk turned to beam at his men.

"Here we are, gentlemen. Hop aboard, and full speed ahead to the village."

The weaving, wavering line of bicycles set off out of the camp and down the road to what they were soon to discover was the village's one and only pub. The Golden Fleece had seen many a strange thing in the past, but seven grown men trying desperately to stay on their bikes and steer in the right direction was a new one, and a sight that had to be seen to be believed.

Propping the bikes against the hedge, they entered the pub and proceeded to the bar. The few locals who were in were quite used to the personnel from the camp coming in for a drink; they nodded pleasantly before returning their attention to their own conversations, dominoes or darts.

"What will ye have, gentlemen?" The publican was a broad, red-haired Scot.

"I don't suppose ye'd hae a wee drop o' whisky?" Scott placed his order quickly.

"As it happens, aye, I do have a bottle tucked away."

"Would it be all right to have a dram?"

"For a fellow Aberdonian." The barman reached under the counter and produced a bottle, not quite full. "Just the one dram, though - I dinna ken when my next supply will be coming. Still, the war can't last for ever. What will the rest o' ye be wanting?"

"Well...um...what have you got?" Dave Tyson asked tentatively. None of them knew much about the type of drink served in the twentieth century, but it was a sensible enough question, considering how empty the shelves were.

"Well, we've some beer and a little gin."

"In that case, I'll have beer, please," Kirk requested.

The rest waited to see what the drink would look like before they ordered. Kirk's drink was placed on the bar in front of him; he took a sip gingerly, then

smiled. The others, encouraged by this, also ordered beer. The first mouthful tasted strange to them all, but they quickly got used to it.

"Shall we go and sit by the fire?" Kirk asked. The glowing logs looked very inviting and the warmth of the fire drew them like a magnet. In the controlled environment of the Enterprise, they had almost forgotten what it was like to be cold. They settled comfortably round a circular table.

"Scotty, I didn't know you came from Aberdeen."

There was no reply as Scott sipped his drink.

"Enjoying your drink, Scotty?" Kirk grinned at the engineer.

"It's pure nec'ar, Jim. Ye should try a wee drop."

"Maybe I will, some time, Scotty. Just now, I'd like to know something."

"What?"

"Do you come from Aberdeen?"

"I spent some years in the city," Scott replied, but refused to say any more as he lifted his drink for another sip.

Kirk finished his beer and looked at the empty glass. "I think I'll get another round."

He strolled over to the bar and placed his order. Carrying the drinks back to their table on a tray, he carefully put it down, grinning triumphantly at Scott as he gave him the second whisky that he had managed to coerce out of the barman. "Now, gentlemen, about the medicals tomorrow; you will just have to put up with Dr. McCoy grumbling, as he will be using what to him will be antiquated methods and equipment and he will more than likely be out of temper about it." He remembered to keep his voice low.

The beer was now beginning to have its effect on them; approved drinks in Starfleet bars were considerably less strong.

"That's his usual approach, isn't it, sir?" Paul Jones questioned amid the laughter of the others.

Next morning, James Kirk rolled over to the sound of reveille and thought about going back to sleep. It took several moments for him to realise where he was, then it came back to him through the haze that he was at R.A.F. Blackhill, and that sound meant that it was time to get up.

He rolled out of bed. As soon as his feet touched the floor he realised how terrible he felt; his head hurt and his stomach ached. "Oh, my head!" he groaned as he slowly began to wash in the washhand basin in the room. As he did so, he thought, I knew I shouldn't have mixed those drinks!

Try as he could, he just could not remember how he had got back to his quarters, or, for that matter, even how he had got back to camp. The only answer he could come up with was that the others had managed to slip him past the guard. Well, he decided, there's no point in worrying about it. Scotty stuck to the scotch so he's bound to know what happened.

At breakfast, the rest of the crew were also nursing their heads and groaning. Black coffee seemed to be the main diet. Kirk drew up a chair and sat down with his own coffee. "Well, I see we all feel the same this morning," he started. "Can anyone tell me how we got back to camp last night?"

"We thought you got us back," Tom Davidson said. He took a mouthful of coffee.

"Hmm. Well, I only hope we didn't do anything to get ourselves in trouble for." Kirk shook his head thoughtfully; he couldn't imagine how they had all managed to arrive back at camp the previous night, without any one of them remembering how they did it.

The coffee finished, he looked round his men. "I suppose we had better make our way to the medical centre and get the j'y- ...medicals over with."

They made their way out of the mess into the corridor, which at that moment was deserted. "Are you sure Dr. McCoy is here?" Scott asked. "I mean, he left Azaria with us, but he wasn't at the station when we arrived." He was puzzled, but not worried, for he knew McCoy would be safe wherever the Guardian had sent him.

The Captain's voice brought him back to the present, and he turned towards Kirk expectantly. "I'm sure it would be more than the Guardian's life is worth to mess around with Dr. McCoy." Kirk smiled as the rest of the crew began to laugh. "Also, I think that the next time we go out for a drink, we should stick to the one type of drink and not mix different ones that we're not used to." He pushed the swing doors open and headed for the transport that was to take them to the medical centre. The others fell into step behind him, all looking a little pale as they passed into the watery sunshine.

"The skipper's right. My head aches something wicked this morning. What did we have to drink, anyway?" Dave Tyson rubbed his eyes carefully, suppressing a groan.

"I know we started on beer, then I remember we talked the barman into giving us all a Scotch, and then we decided to try the gin," Jim Kirk replied. "I don't remember anything clearly after that."

Tom Davidson nodded. "Yes, I can remember that much, but after that is a complete blank -- until this morning, that is."

"Same with me," John Keller piped up.

Kirk was observing his engineering officer with some amusement. "Scotty? You haven't said anything."

"I haven't anything to say," Scott replied as he climbed into the truck.

"You were as drunk as the rest of us last night, Mr. Scott," Jones said slyly from the back of the truck.

"I shouldna' hae been, wi' what I had tae drink!" Scott snapped. "I didna' hae that much -- just whisky and a few glasses o' gin, that wis a'." Still muttering, he joined the rest of them in the three tonner, the tail gate was banged shut and the vehicle moved off.

The medical centre was across the main road and about three miles away from the main compound and the main working buildings; in case of air attack, the sick and injured would be well out of the way of danger. Kirk and his crew sat quietly, being bounced from side to side as the truck lumbered up the road. The screech of the brakes gave brief warning that they were stopping; the jolt threw them forwards towards the front of the truck.

Leaving the provided transport, they saw the doors of the main entrance ahead of them. Moving through the hospital, they came to a sign that indicated the waiting room. They went in and found themselves comfortable seats. Just

as they made themselves comfortable, however, a white-clad orderly came through the door at the other end of the room, clip-board in hand. He surveyed the gathered men, and picking out Kirk, strode purposefully towards him.

"Squadron Leader Kirk?" There was a questioning look in his eyes.

"Yes."

"If you would just come this way, please, the Doctor will be ready for you in a minute." Turning away, he beckoned Kirk to follow him through the door that was marked 'private'.

"Thank you." Kirk advanced towards the door directly behind the orderly, who knocked twice on the door. There was no reply; the orderly opened the door and disappeared inside. Kirk stood waiting; the orderly returned and gestured him to come in. Once inside, he watched the orderly close the door.

"If you just go behind the screen and strip to your shorts, Squadron Leader, the Doctor will be in directly." The orderly left through another door at the far end of the room.

Kirk was left to get on with making himself ready. At the side of the room was a set of white screens; Kirk moved behind them and discovered a couch. Perching himself on the edge, he began to remove his clothing. As he took off his trousers, the click of the door opening alerted him to the doctor's arrival.

"Well, Bones, you certainly took your time getting here!"

Kirk's words did not bring the reply he had expected. When the silence was eventually broken, Kirk got quite a shock. "I have been called many things, Squadron Leader, but never have I been referred to as 'Bones' before."

Kirk stopped dead. The voice was definitely not McCoy's -- in fact, it was distinctly female! Peering over the top of the screen, he came face to face with a cool, statuesque blonde.

James Kirk could feel the colour riding up his neck in a hot flush of embarrassment. "Who are you? You don't look like Dr. McCoy to me." Kirk could have kicked himself for his stupidity even as he spoke.

"You don't appear to need your eyes tested, Squadron Leader... Now perhaps you would like to come out from behind the screen, then I can begin the examination. I am Dr. Marsh. You appear to find it incredible that women can qualify as doctors? Nowadays it is quite common."

"Yes, I'm sure it is...it's just that I've never had one examine me before." Kirk felt a little less hot around the collar now.

"Squadron Leader, surely you can't be shy? Now come along -- I don't have all day to examine you." Dr. Marsh stared coolly into the eyes just visible above the screen.

"I'll just put my trousers on, then." Kirk ducked behind the screen, one leg raised to suit the action to the words.

"You most certainly will not!" Dr. Marsh raised her eyebrows. "Come on -- you certainly weren't shy last night!" She looked through Kirk like women do when they have a secret.

"Me? Are you sure? I don't remember meeting you last night..." He was well aware that he wouldn't remember if he had met a dinosaur last night.

"I'm sure you don't. In fact, I wouldn't be at all surprised if you couldn't remember who you were last night, the state you were in."

Kirk had begun to look worried, a frown creasing his brows. "I hope I...er ...managed to behave myself?"

"Yes, well...I don't know if you would call singing and practising ducking for apples in the village pond behaving yourselves -- you and your crew."

"Oh no!" Kirk wished that the ground would open up and swallow him, he felt such a fool.

"I'm afraid so. I took it upon myself to return you all to the camp and make sure you got to your beds safely."

Kirk's mind raced. Surely she could not have meant that she personally had put him to bed? After all, women were not allowed in the barracks...and when he awoke this morning, he was only wearing his shorts; his uniform was hung up. He felt himself going red all over again.

Dr. Marsh had read the fleeting expressions on his face, and decided to take pity on him. "Luckily I knew the corporal of the guard, and it was he and his men who helped out in hauling you back to your quarters instead of the guardhouse."

"I'm sorry if we caused you any inconvenience." Relieved, Kirk felt that the least he could do was apologise.

"Don't worry about it, Squadron Leader. Now, do you think we could possibly get on with the examination?"

Some twenty minutes later, Kirk was busying himself dressing behind the screen. If the truth were told, he was glad that the whole thing was over.

"Well, Squadron Leader, I am sure you will be delighted to know that you are in excellent condition, and I have passed you fit for flying duty." Dr. Marsh spoke from behind her desk, where she was making notes in a folder.

"Thank you. Dr. Marsh...I was wondering if you would consider coming out for a meal or a drink with me, to sort of...make amends for last night." Kirk smiled winningly.

"That really isn't necessary - and I make a point of not mixing business with pleasure; but thank you for the offer. Just send the next man in on your way out." With that, the doctor turned back to complete her notes in Kirk's file. Kirk left the room with a smile on his face.

On entering the waiting room, he gestured to Scott. "She's all ready for you Scotty."

"She? She? But sir...isn't...isn't McCoy...?"

"Sorry, Scotty." Kirk shook his head as Scott left the waiting room. Kirk watched him go, a broad grin dawning; how he would love to be a fly on the wall in the doctor's office as she examined Mr. Scott. Kirk knew Scott's innate shyness too well to think that he would feel at ease with Dr. Marsh.

He sat down to think over his next move. He had to find out when he would get to try out the new Lancaster bomber. He was slightly worried about flying the craft, even though he had had no trouble handling the simulator; but he had a part to play and he must play it convincingly; he did not relish the thought of being discovered as something other than he appeared to be. If their ruse was discovered, he and his men would be tried as spies.

Group Captain Crompton sat behind his desk completing some of the paperwork that is the bane of every commander's life. A sharp knock on his door gave him the chance to put down his pen and leave the paperwork for a few minutes.

"Come in," he called.

Kirk opened the door; standing in the doorway, he saw Group Captain Crompton leaning back in his chair.

"Good morning, Squadron Leader. Medicals finished with?"

"Yes, sir."

"I take it everything was all right." Crompton would have the official

report within a couple of hours, but even in that time a special mission could crop up.

"Yes, sir, I care through with flying colours, no problems at all...except with the Doctor." Kirk hoped to find out a little about the very efficient Dr. Marsh.

"Ann Marsh? She's a fine doctor. What sort of problem?"

"Well, sir, I quite agree that she is a good doctor...but she's somewhat... detached...from her patients."

"Yes. She's a little detached from everyone at the moment. She lost her husband recently. In fact, you are his replacement." Crompton seemed to slip into the past for a moment, his eyes looking into the distance.

"Oh, God! I'm sorry -- I didn't know."

"How could you?" Crompton seemed to pull himself back into the present. "Well -- what can I do for you, Squadron Leader?"

"I'd like a chance to try out a Lancaster, sir, if it's all right with you."

Surveying Squadron Leader Kirk closely, Crompton realised that Kirk was really keen to get back up into the air. Perhaps he wouldn't have been so pleased at the thought had he realised that the last time Kirk had flown in actual air was more than twenty years ago; one couldn't count pan-galactic space as a similar thing.

"Very well. First thing tomorrow you can take the squadron on a training flight."

"Thank you, sir. I'll notify my men right now."

Kirk took his leave, feeling rather pleased with himself. He had probably only anticipated the order to go out on a training flight by perhaps twenty-four hours, but he had established his keenness, and that was the important thing.

The medical had proved to be rather an embarrassment to Mr. Scott, and on returning to the barracks he was heard to mumble something about going for a drink and promptly disappeared. No doubt he would be in a better mood when he heard that he would be able to check the engines of a real Lancaster before tomorrow's flight.

All the crews involved were notified of the morning exercise, and as usual the crews taking part were confined to the camp the night before the operation. The lights winked out one by one all over the camp; all was silent, only the guardroom holding any sign of life. The safety of the camp could depend on the vigilance of the few who remained awake.

Each man lay awake in his bunk for a while, thinking over the flight to come. Scott had checked over the engines earlier on and appeared satisfied; Tom Davidson had produced a flight plan just along the coast for their first flight, and Kirk had been pleased with it. Eventually they slept. In the morning, weather permitting...

The morning dawned fine and dry; just the kind of weather for a jaunt into the bright blue yonder. Kirk, his crew and the other men in the squadron stepped out onto the tarmac of the runway to watch the arrival of a Stirling bomber. The pilot circled the airfield once then began his descent. The landing was perfect, and Kirk hoped that his own would be even half as good. After touching down the pilot taxied to within twenty feet of Kirk and his crew. The heavy metal door clanged back against the frame of the aircraft as it was pushed forcefully from within. The crew stood and stared at the opening as a loud rumbling protest drifted out of the doorway.

"My God, man, I feel as if every bone in my entire body has been bounded, rattled and thoroughly shaken! I shall never travel in one of these contraptions

again -- not unless drastic measures are taken to improve the comfort of your passengers! No seats, no drinks, no heat, nothing..."

By this time the disembodied voice had reached the doorway; Kirk and his men were crowding round the bottom rung of the ladder waiting for the Chief Medical Officer of the Enterprise, Dr. Leonard McCoy; no-one else they knew would make such a fuss.

"Jim! Scotty! How is it that you get the comfortable type of transport and I'm nearly frozen, shaken and deafened in that monstrosity?"

Every man there had begun to laugh at the antics of Dr. McCoy as he dangled in the doorway of the bomber. "Welcome to R.A.F. Blackhill, Bones -- glad you made it -- eventually." Kirk stifled the urge to laugh at the figure of his friend, toggled up as it was in leather flying helmet, ear pieces flapping in the wind as he gingerly stepped down and away from the Stirling. His place was taken by the pilot of the craft, a tough looking Australian.

"Would he be a cobbler of yours, mate?" he asked loudly.

"Yes, I guess you could say that," Kirk replied.

"Rather you than me, mate -- he's sure enough given me earache all the way here. Say, could you point me in the direction of the C.O.'s? Better report in."

"I rather think the C.O. is en route for you at this very minute -- here's his car now." Kirk turned towards McCoy as the C.O.'s car pulled up next to their group. "See you later, Bones -- right now I've got to fly!"

Kirk moved off towards the distant line of planes. Just as McCoy was about to answer, the C.O. stepped out from his car and the Australian stood smartly to attention and saluted; McCoy followed his example.

"Good morning, gentlemen, would you care for a lift back to H.Q. with me? You can make your reports while we travel."

With that settled, McCoy and the Australian were whisked away from the runway where the rumble of the Lancasters began to drown out every other noise. The ten aircraft gave an extra growl as they left the ground. McCoy, perched on the back seat of the car, heard the noise of the take-off and sent up a silent prayer that Scott could do as good a job as Spock in keeping Jim Kirk out of trouble. Although they 'fought' frequently, McCoy privately admitted Spock's level-headedness, which would have kept Jim from some foolhardy attempt at the impossible.

Spock hesitated by the turbolift door. The time was 1859; he was due off duty at 1900. He took one last look around the bridge to satisfy himself that all was in order before finally handing over to Lt. Sulu.

"You have the con, Mr. Sulu." Spock gave the necessary order which enabled him to go off duty. His watch completed, and Sulu safely in charge, he entered the waiting turbolift.

Once the doors slid closed behind him, Uhura spoke. "He's worried." Her statement was to no-one in particular -- however, it was Sulu who replied, his own anxiety clearly heard in his voice.

"If you can call it that for a Vulcan, I'd say he was more than just worried."

Sulu watched as Uhura turned back to her console. "Bridge to sickbay."

"What are you doing?" Sulu crossed to her side.

"Wait and see," she replied.

"Sickbay. Nurse Chapel." The Nurse's voice filled the bridge.

"Chris, Spock's on his way down. He hasn't eaten anything all day."

"I'll see what I can do about it. Thanks for letting me know." There was a click as the intercom was switched off.

Sulu placed his hand on Uhura's shoulder. "You'd make a super mother, Uhura."

"Yesterday I was going to make someone a good wife, now I'm a mother!" she teased. "But the ship certainly needs a mother - it's full of little boys!"

Chris Chapel carefully picked her way through the crowded officer's mess to the table in the corner of the room that Spock had chosen. Even if she had not come meaning to sit beside Spock, she would have had little choice, for it was almost the only seat left in the room.

"Mind if I join you?" she asked, laying her tray on the table.

Spock looked up from the table top which he had been contemplating for the last ten minutes. "By all means," he responded. He caught sight of the two plates on the tray and one eyebrow rose delicately.

"One of these is for you," she informed him, pushing it towards him.

"I am not hungry," Spock informed her bluntly, pushing the dish back.

"Mr. Spock, if you do not eat that soup I will inform Dr. M'Benga and your 'lack of appetite' becomes a medical matter. You either eat or end up in sickbay being fed through a tube."

Chapel held Spock's gaze for a long moment while he made up his mind. Finally he lifted the spoon and started to eat. Once he was finished, Chapel looked at him with something like approval. "Spock, there's nothing you can do but wait, so there's no point in making yourself ill." She waited for some comment, but Spock remained silent. "Look, Dr. McCoy's not about to let anything happen to the Captain. Neither will Scotty."

"You are correct, but..."

"I know, Jim Kirk can be very pig-headed at times. But then again, so can Dr. McCoy - as you well know." She smiled at the thought.

"However - "

"Spock. Please. Don't make yourself ill. What if the Captain should need you?"

"Christine... Thank you." He spoke her first name with less reluctance than usual as he stood.

Hiding her sudden embarrassment she looked up at him and smiled. "That's all right. Now go and get some rest."

Nodding, Spock moved off towards the door. She gave him a few moments to get clear of the corridor before she headed back to sickbay. Somehow she felt a little better. She might not be able to help Kirk directly, but she could make sure that his First Officer was in good shape when he returned.

McCoy had spent a boring ten minutes with the Station's C.O., and that had been the final straw. He had taken as much as was humanly possible for a man out of the twenty-third century who was used to all the home comforts of shuttle travel. As he came storming out of the building, a young lad came smartly to attention and saluted him. McCoy thanked God that the salute was the same; that at least was one good thing, he thought as he returned it.

"Dr. McCoy?" the young aircraftman asked.

"Yes."

"I'm your driver, sir. I've been assigned to transport you to the hospital."

McCoy's first thought was of the Enterprise's transporter, but he soon discovered that his transport was in fact an old staff car with a really awful paint job. Whoever had wielded the paint brush obviously couldn't make up his mind whether the car was supposed to be black or green.

His driver had already put his kitbag in the back. "Climb in, sir, it won't bite!" the young lad joked.

"I hope not," McCoy replied as he took his seat next to the driver. "I never did like these things."

The drive to the hospital was over quickly; and it was a far more comfortable trip for McCoy, in the car -- old though it was -- than it had been for the others in a three ton truck. The car pulled into a side road which led to the hospital grounds. This afforded McCoy his first glimpse of the prefabricated buildings which housed the hospital. This was certainly far worse than McCoy had ever dreamed of; he sincerely hoped that the inside was better than the outside.

"Sir, that's where the operating room is." The driver was pointing to the building nearest to them. The road began to narrow and the driver slowed down; McCoy noticed that the hospital was built to form a rectangle, each part connected by long corridors. The driver had at that very moment drawn to a halt outside two large swing doors.

"Dr. Marsh should be doing the rounds at the moment, but your office is down the corridor on the right," the driver informed him as he lifted the doctor's bag out of the car.

"Thank you," McCoy replied, taking the kitbag from the driver. The car drove away as he turned towards the hospital. Having entered the swing doors, he was confronted by a small hole in the wall opposite. Hanging above this small aperture was a sign in large black letters. McCoy read the word 'RECEPTION', and underneath, in smaller letters, 'Please ring bell'. Looking below, McCoy discovered a small white button. His slim surgeon's finger reached out and pressed.

The peal of the bell echoed along the corridor, the tiled floor a highly polished mirror. McCoy stood impatiently, waiting for someone to answer the summons of the bell. Suddenly a head and shoulders of a white-clad orderly appeared through the hatch.

"At last! I was beginning to wonder if there was anyone here at all."

"Sorry, sir. You must be Flight Lieutenant McCoy. We were expecting you earlier."

"I had a spot of trouble with my transport and had to fly.*

"I'll show you to your office. Follow me, please." The orderly opened the door and stepped out into the corridor. As McCoy followed him, several paces behind, he was able to get a good picture of the hospital's interior. He noticed several doors on either side of the passage, which he assumed were the wards. At the end of the corridor the orderly turned sharply to the left, and entered the first door on the right, which was marked 'OFFICE'.

"Well, this is it, sir -- home sweet home as it were."

"Thank you. The C.O. told me that a Dr. Marsh has been helping out in the absence of a permanent M.O.?"

"Yes, sir. Dr. Marsh is very competent."

"I don't doubt it. Do you think you could ask him to come and see me? I'd like to catch up with the work as soon as possible." McCoy was looking round as he spoke. The room contained a desk, some filing cabinets and -- unusual for a hospital office in wartime, he thought -- some potted plants, which were sitting on the window sill.

"I'll do that, sir. Shall I say to come at once?" The orderly had suffered

abuse from several people when he explained that Dr. Marsh was a woman, and he decided not to mention it just yet. He had every faith in Dr. Marsh's ability to deflate anyone who thought she was less than competent merely because of her sex.

"No, no, as soon as it's convenient will be fine."

"Very good, sir." The orderly left McCoy to his own devices as he moved off in search of Dr. Marsh. McCoy sat behind the desk and cursed the defecting scientist whose stupidity had resulted in their being here.

Dr. Marsh knocked on McCoy's door and waited. It was only ten minutes since she had spoken to the orderly and received the new Doctor's summons.

"Come," a gruff voice responded from within.

She opened the door and silently entered. McCoy turned from his contemplation of the countryside -- the window offered him a wide view.

"Yes, Nurse?" McCoy eyed the woman standing in the doorway.

"Dr. McCoy, I am Dr. Ann Marsh. You sent for me." Her voice was cool.

"Oh. I'm sorry -- nobody told me, I automatically assumed you were a nurse. Please be seated." He indicated the chair in front of his desk. "I see you've completed the medicals of the new postings."

"Yes."

"Please fill me in." The medicals he was referring to sat piled on the top of his desk, but he preferred to get a verbal report as well.

"Certainly. Squadron Leader Kirk presented no problem; he is exceptionally fit. Flight Lieutenant Scott, on the other hand, was very reluctant to permit a woman to examine him."

McCoy tried to keep a straight face. I bet he was! he thought to himself. "Yes, some men are like that. But according to the records, he is fully fit?"

"I have my methods," Ann Marsh smiled composedly.

McCoy looked interested. "Explain."

"I simply threatened to report him to the C.O. for his conduct in the village the first night he was here."

"Oh? What was he doing? I -- er -- I think it's quite a good idea for a medical officer to know as much as possible about the general behaviour of the men on the base. Some of them can't cope with the stresses of military life, and if you can see a potential breakdown before it happens..."

While McCoy heard the full story of the night the Enterprise men arrived, those same men were getting ready for their first semi-operational flight.

The ten 'Crusaders' had reached the North Sea within minutes of leaving the airfield. Paul Jones and Dave Smith both asked permission to test their machine guns at the earliest opportunity; they had been warned that they had to be prepared to engage the enemy as soon as they crossed the Scottish coast. Kirk sat at the controls, more relaxed than he'd expected to be, and listened to the steady sounds of the Lancaster.

No doubt the crews of the other planes were as keen to get on with the job as he was, even though their job was different. Perhaps this was the moment for a practice run to see how good these planes were at manoeuvring at low level across the sea and over the cliffs.

"Red leader to all crews -- are you ready for a little practice? Here we go -- follow me in!"

Kirk's voice echoed in the headsets of the members of the special squadron,

and he thrilled at the eagerness in the voices acknowledging the order.

Keeping as low as they dared to the surface of the water, they banked sharply as they turned once more towards the rugged coast. The formation roared onwards towards the craggy, bird-covered cliffs of the north-eastern coast of Scotland.

"Ready Red One - follow me in. We're going to climb right up the cliff face and over the top, staying as low as we can to avoid radar."

"Roger, Red Leader." The voice of Duffy Jones, the pilot of Red One, came over the headphones.

The Lancaster's engines screamed as they aimed for the part of the coast that over the years had been eroded by the action of the sea.

"Red Leader, I'm getting an oil pressure warning light on numbers two and four engines. I'm not going to be able to follow you as instructed."

"Very well, Red One, return to base and get the damn thing checked. Red Three, escort Red One back to base." Kirk could almost see the giant merlin engines straining under the lack of oil pressure.

"Roger Red Leader."

Kirk watched as the pilot of Red One feathered the two engines that were causing the problem.

"Breaking off now, sir."

"Roger. Good luck. Right then - Red Two, let's get cracking, shall we?"

"Roger, Red Leader, I'm with you." Stephen McAllister was a good pilot, and according to his records he had already several citations to his name.

Once again the two aircraft gained speed as the ~~rocky~~ cliffs loomed ahead, growing larger every minute.

"Red Leader, this is Red Two. Oil pressure dropping on two and four engines. Permission to abort the run."

"Granted. The rest of you had better go back too." Kirk could not control the annoyance in his voice as he continued with the run in. "It seems as if it's just going to be us lads; hold tight."

The engines screamed determinedly. Kirk's face was set and resolved as he began to pull the yoke back hard. The plane shot upwards and ploughed straight into a flock of frightened seagulls who were streaming away from their ledges on the cliff face.

The propellers cut through the gulls, splattering blood and feathers everywhere. "Damn!" Kirk had forgotten that there would be birds on the cliffs. An enormous white seagull hit the windscreen, shattering it into thousands of jagged bits of glass. The flying glass slashed Kirk's forehead; he jerked sideways, lifting his right arm to protect his eyes - a reflex action despite his knowledge that he was wearing goggles - as the searing pain hit his nervous system. He slammed into the side of the cockpit as the blackness of insensibility sent him reeling into unconsciousness. Scott's cry of horror went unheard; he grabbed the controls and heaved back on the yoke, praying all the time. "Dear God, come on you wee darling, you can make it, you've got to make it. Come on - up...up...good girl!"

The rest of the crew held their breath. They could hear Scott's muttered pleas and added their own encouragement to the battered aircraft. The sweat ran down Scott's face, his energy concentrated wholly on pulling the plane up and over the top of the cliff. At last he could turn part of his attention to his Captain, who was beginning to groan in pain as he became conscious once more. Blood from the gash on his forehead had run down the side of his face and it was impossible to guess how serious the injury actually was.

"What hit us?" Kirk was trying to assess the situation. He could just make out the outline of the shattered windscreen through a haze. "My God! How did we get out of that, Scotty?"

"A lot of luck and plenty of prayers. How do you feel, sir?"

"A bit groggy, and my head hurts."

Scott could see that Kirk was, as usual, trying to play down his injury.

"Do you think that you can land the plane, then?" Scotty was quite sure that he could not; he was still not fully conscious.

"I don't think so. My vision... Scotty, I can't see properly."

"Then let's get back to camp and let Dr. McCoy have a look at that head."

"We'll say it was my own fault...and it was, Scotty. I clean forgot there would be gulls on the cliffs. Maybe it's as well the others had that oil problem; if they'd run into the birds they might have crashed right into the cliff."

"It's just as well I had a go on the simulator back on the Enterprise," Scott growled. He hadn't expected to get the chance to fly the plane, but he hadn't been able to resist the challenge. "It might no' be a fancy landing, but I think I can get her down."

Meanwhile, Dave Tyson had been relaying details of their accident to the camp and requesting a doctor to stand by for Squadron Leader Kirk as soon as they landed.

Dr. Marsh had just finished telling McCoy about her first meeting with Kirk and his crew. McCoy had been so engrossed by the tale that the sound of the telephone ringing made him jump visibly. It was several seconds before he recovered from the shock and realised that it was the phone on his desk that had pealed so urgently.

"It might be important, Dr. McCoy -- you'd better answer it." Ann Marsh was staring at the instrument, obviously itching to answer it. It could only mean trouble -- trouble about which she might be able to do something.

Pulling himself together, McCoy lifted the receiver to his ear, hoping that he had the thing the right way round. He preferred the communications console they had on the Enterprise.

"McCoy." He spoke quickly into the handset. Ann Marsh watched McCoy's face closely. Silently McCoy listened to the caller's account of the accident; his face began to pale. "I'll be right there." He slammed the phone back down on its cradle.

"Trouble?" Ann Marsh held McCoy with her eyes.

"Jim Kirk!" McCoy snapped as he ran for the door. She ran after him, feeling somewhat worried. As McCoy reached the outer swing door, she caught up with him.

"What about Jim Kirk?" she asked anxiously as they leaped into the waiting transport, not even querying his use of the first name rather than the rank.

"He's been injured, and Scotty's making an emergency landing. I only hope he can manage to get them down in one piece; they've no windscreen and only two engines."

Ann Marsh patted his arm in reassurance but remained silent, remembering the day when the C.O. had called to tell her how her husband wouldn't be coming back. She had appreciated his consideration, coming to tell her himself...it would have been so easy for him to have delegated the task on the pretext of weight of work -- an excuse which would have been true.

As the car swung in through the main gates both she and McCoy were nearly thrown from their seats. The jolt seemed to bring them back to reality. Ahead of them the wailing siren of the fire engine blared and they could see its crew hastily climbing aboard as it began to move. The clamour of the field ambulance nearly deafened them as it sped past on its way to the runway.

Scott could only hope for a safe landing. True he had tried out the simulator back on the Enterprise, but he hadn't tried anything fancy. Here he was flying a Lancaster with only two working engines; and even as he prepared for the landing, the oil pressure warning lights on the other two engines flashed on. Oil pressure was dropping rapidly.

"Let's see... Wheels down...flaps...gently throttle back...yoke forward slowly..." Scotty lined the plane up with the centre of the runway as he muttered the procedure, knowing that if he wasn't right first time he wouldn't get a second chance.

The Lancaster was badly battered; not only was the windscreen shattered, part of the nose gunner's windscreen was also smashed and the glass of the upper turret damaged. Outside, Paul Jones could see a mass of blood and feathers sticking to the plane. Surveying the damage to his own upper gun turret, he knew he had been lucky to escape without injury.

Dr. McCoy and Ann Marsh arrived amongst the organised chaos in time to watch the downward sweep of the bomber towards the runway. The other planes in the squadron that had not already landed when word of the emergency reached the airfield circled nearby, staying out of the way.

"I hope to God Scotty can land her," McCoy said anxiously.

"He's run into a flock of birds by the looks of it," one of the other pilots said from behind McCoy. "I only hope the landing gear locked."

McCoy looked sharply at Ann Marsh, who nodded in silent agreement for she found her throat had become dry. Talking was impossible at that moment. She had seen too many come back only to explode on landing. There was nothing anyone could do if the plane exploded.

In the cockpit, Kirk tried in vain to focus on the instrument panel in front of him. The attempt only made him feel sick as everything began to spin round once again.

"Right - hold tight, here we go."

If Kirk could have seen at that moment, he would have noticed that Scott's knuckles were bone white. "I'm already hanging on, Scotty. If I let go I'll fall over - my head feels like a merry-go-round."

"Ah, well, it was only a figure of speech, Captain." Rivulets of sweat were running down Scott's face. The ground was very close now; he could almost feel it. "Easy now...let her down gently...only a few feet to go..." He was speaking to himself.

The wheels bumped and bounded up and down; the plane resembled a kangaroo rather than a Lancaster bomber, but at least she was down without incident, much to the relief of the crew.

Ambulance and fire engine rushed towards the finally motionless aircraft. Both Doctors had jumped back into their transport and sped after them, followed on foot by everyone else who had been watching.

The door of the Lancaster began to open as they arrived. Scott appeared first, trying to help Kirk. Dave Tyson gathered Kirk's other arm across his shoulder as they tried to help him from the craft.

"For heaven's sake, you two, I'm not an invalid," he protested. "I can manage!" Both men looked at each other. "Let me go!" Kirk ordered.

"Well, if you say so -- but don't say I didna' warn you." Scott had been trying to lower him to the ground up until that moment; now he let go. Jim Kirk leaped to the ground, stumbled and fell.

"My God, Jim!" McCoy yelled as he climbed out of the staff car. "Bring that stretcher over here -- quick, man!" As McCoy spoke, Kirk was desperately trying to find his feet. McCoy helped him up, half supporting him with his body.

"Bones? I'll be just fine as soon as someone stops spinning the world round and turns the lights back on."

Both Doctors glanced at each other, the same thought occurring simultaneously. Optical damage.

"Bring that stretcher in here! You don't expect us to carry him to it, do you?" McCoy snapped at the man with the stretcher.

"I can walk, Bones," Kirk protested. "And I don't need that thing." He pointed to the stretcher -- of at least, he tried to. The men were standing three or four feet from him; his arm began to waver all over the place as he tried to focus on them.

"I think it would be sensible to come with us, Squadron Leader." Ann Marsh looked Kirk in the eyes. His eyes were glazed, and it was clear to her that he could not see.

"Dr. Marsh. Such a lot of concern. I really do think you must like me more than you let on." Kirk smiled crookedly as he allowed McCoy and Scott to place him on the stretcher.

"Good grief, Jim, you must have had more of a bang than I thought." McCoy could not believe his ears; never had he heard the Captain of the Enterprise speak like that to a woman in such a public place.

"Don't worry, Dr. McCoy, I am quite capable of managing the Squadron Leader, as I am sure he will soon discover."

"Promises, promises. Doctor, I just can't wait..." Kirk's voice grew fainter as he was carried away to the waiting ambulance. The clanging bell once more rang out as it raced away towards the hospital.

The vehicle carrying Kirk and the two Doctors was soon lost to view. Scott and the crew moved off in the direction of the debriefing room, for the C.O. would want to know immediately exactly what had happened.

The ride to the hospital was a complete blur to Kirk; the two Doctors were bent over him for most of the journey, seeming intent on poking and prodding him all the way there. He lost consciousness as they carried him into the surgery, and didn't feel the stitches McCoy so carefully put in his forehead; nor did he stir as he was moved to a room on his own.

The door to Kirk's room opened some hours later, and both McCoy and Ann Marsh moved silently into the room. They lifted his chart from the bottom of his bed and were intent on studying it when Kirk stirred. His eyes refused to open and it took him a few seconds to realise that they were covered with a bandage.

"He's coming to." McCoy gestured towards the figure in the bed. Both Doctors moved to his side. "How do you feel, Jim?" McCoy lifted Kirk's wrist to check his pulse, glad that he had enough faith in the old method to have used it often enough for the action to look natural.

"Bones," Kirk muttered as he tried to sit up, only to find McCoy's restraining arm pushing him back down, albeit gently. "I can't see!"

"Lie still, Jim. I mean it --" as Kirk pulled a face. "There could be optical damage. Your eyes are bandaged. Now you just lie still and try not to move your head too much."

"Must I?" Kirk groaned.

"Yes. If you don't, I'll strap you down myself until you're fully fit. Now what's it to be?"

Dr. Marsh watched the exchange between the two men with interest, knowing now who the mysterious 'Bones' was. Odd that McCoy hadn't indicated that he already knew Kirk and his crew until this happened. There was something about these men that fascinated her.

"I'll stay still. I know how much you would enjoy tying me up." Kirk's morale was still high, clearly, as he attempted to joke with his friend. McCoy grunted.

"Good. But just to make sure -- Dr. Marsh, if you please."

She had already checked the dosage in the syringe, flicking it with her finger and squirting the excess into the air. All that remained was to administer the injection. Kirk was not aware of her until it was too late; pinching the skin on his upper arm, she slid the needle smoothly in and out again.

"Ouch! What was that for?" he demanded.

"Just a little insurance -- a mild sedative to help you keep your promise to stay still until we get the results of the tests." McCoy gave his usual smile although Kirk could not see it. As they watched, Kirk slid back down to the depths of sleep. Once satisfied that he was sleeping, they headed back to McCoy's office. On the way, Ann Marsh commented on the work McCoy had done to Kirk's forehead.

"Dr. McCoy, those were the smallest stitches I've ever seen; your needle work is excellent. I'd like to learn from you if I can. That's if you don't mind?"

"Please, call me 'Bones' or 'Leonard'." He smiled. "I'd be glad to give you a few pointers. It's a technique I developed as I hate buttonhole stitches," McCoy told her as they walked along the corridor.

"That's most kind of you, Doc -- Leonard. As I'm calling you Leonard, please call me Ann."

"Right, Ann. I wonder if those results are through yet."

"The blood count won't be in yet from the lab, but the X-ray results should be. We've got that department trained to work fast."

"Good."

"One thing's for sure, he hasn't lost his memory. That's a good sign."

"Yes, but Ann, Jim's not usually so forward; what I mean is, he's really quite shy -- that scene was totally out of character."

"I had already come to that conclusion, Leonard," Ann replied, and fell silent. The silence lasted for quite a while as both Doctors thought about their patient. One look at the X-ray told McCoy that if he had been in his own sickbay Jim Kirk would be on his feet in twenty-four hours, but here in the twentieth century he didn't have half the equipment he really needed, even with the medical kit he shouldn't have brought. The question was, how much could he get away with?

Inside the room, Kirk lay still in the drug-induced sleep. He was dreaming about a picnic; the place was vaguely familiar and the girl with him reminded him of Edith...

Scotty had rung the hospital to check on the condition of his Captain before he began work on the mysterious trouble they were having with the engine. He had now been at it for nearly four hours and was covered in oil and grease from the waist up. Suddenly he looked up, a satisfied grin on his face. He had finally tracked down the fault to a small inlet pipe which passed oil into the engine.

Someone arriving at that moment would have thought that he must be mad, sitting at the top of the ladder looking like an advert for the 'Black and White Minstrel Show', talking to himself.

"The pipe's never wide enough for the flow that this engine would require." Scotty slid down the ladder and rushed off to change into his best uniform; he would have to go and see the Engineering Officer to discuss his discovery before they could make any further move.

The next few days were taken up with messages to and from the factory, and the delivery of the new pipe, which had been altered to Scott's new specifications. As soon as these arrived, Scott disappeared into the hangar with the crates and a continual line of Lancasters. They were wheeled in at one end and out again at the other. The factory that was producing the bomber sent out one of their designers to take a look at the problem and Scott's calculations. Having consulted with him on the required changes, the designer returned to the factory with the blueprint of the pipe safely tucked away in his briefcase, totally satisfied. The crews were informed that testing would commence as soon as Squadron Leader Kirk was up and about again.

The village welcome committee had notified the camp of a forthcoming dance that they were welcome to attend, starting at seven thirty the following night. This information went down well with the men. As with all jobs of a dangerous nature, the more they had to hang around waiting the more edgy they became, and a dance seemed to provide an excellent opportunity to release a little tension. Men enjoyed themselves when they could in those days for tomorrow could be their last.

In the hospital, Doctors McCoy and Marsh were busy looking over the final test results on one James T. Kirk.

"Well, Ann, it would seem that our prayers have been answered. There was no optical damage; he was lucky to get away with a concussion."

"Yes. It would seem that blood from the gash on his forehead temporarily blinded him, but you know as well as I do how sure we have to be before we let him fly again."

"Of course - but it's just as well we can tell him to get up and out - don't you think?"

"Definitely. Anyone would think that he was the doctor! After all, we are supposed to make the worst patients - but he really does take the biscuit! I never heard anyone moan so much about having to rest before. You know, I was tempted to put him out again last night; at least when he was under sedation he was quiet."

"Yes - Well, I'm afraid Jim has never been a good patient. He just hates to be helpless and immobile. Luckily, in all our years of service he hasn't been incapacitated very often."

"Oh - you were both in the air force before the war, then?"

McCoy could have kicked himself. "Oh - yes." He could only hope she wouldn't ask for further details. His careless chatter had nearly dropped him right into the fire. He made a mental note to be more careful in future.

Ann Marsh regarded McCoy with an interested expression on her face. There were many things she would like to know about both these men. McCoy's skill with the needle in stitching Kirk's wound was beyond anything she had learned at medical school. Now she learned that they were friends of even longer standing than she had suspected. And as it happened, she was to see something else that was to puzzle her even further on their rounds later on that same day.

Kirk lay in his bed, looking grouchy at the door where a white-clad orderly had hastily passed through only moments before. "If he comes in again asking me if I need to go...I'll...I'll brain him!" he thought out loud. Where

on Earth was Bones? He would soon tell him that he had had enough of hanging around waiting for the pair of them to finish their incessant tests.

The orderly, having escaped without injury from Squadron Leader Kirk's room for the fourth time that morning was hurrying away down the corridor when he bumped into Flight Lieutenant Scott and the rest of Kirk's crew.

"Is it O.K. if we go to see the Squadron Leader?" Scott asked him quietly.

"If you're wearing armour plating, I'm sure you'll be safe enough!" he retorted as he shot into the office behind the reception hatch.

They looked at each other; grinning, they advanced into Kirk's room. The all knew about their Captain's abhorrence of being idle, and he had been in the hospital now almost a week.

"If you come in here with that bottle again, I'll..." Kirk searched round for something to throw at the door as he heard the footsteps.

"You'll what, sir?" Scott asked. The rest of the crew hid behind him, pretending to be afraid.

"Fill it for him then brain him with it!" Kirk snorted. "How are the repairs going, Scotty?"

"If McCoy's done as good a job on your head as Scotty's done on the Lancaster, you'll be laughing," Tyson replied.

"I'd be surprised if he has - after all, it's only 1941," Kirk responded as he sat up, thankful that the room no longer spun round.

"How is the head, anyway?" Scott asked, eyeing Kirk's still bandaged forehead.

"Fine. Bones hasn't said anything to you about when I can expect to get out of here, has he?"

"No - but then we haven't seen him since you were admitted," Tyson told him.

"All right, gentlemen, haven't you anything better to do than stand around here?" Ann Marsh stood just inside the door, her arms folded. "Out!" she commanded. Nobody dared argue.

"We'll be seeing you, sir," Scott mumbled.

"Scotty?" Kirk raised his hand.

"Yes, sir?"

"Will you look in again tomorrow night?"

"Sorry sir - there's a dance on at the village hall and the landlord of The Golden Fleece promised to have some whisky. You wouldn't want me to pass up a chance like that - would ye?"

"No." Kirk sounded very disheartened.

The crew escaped, closing the door as they left.

"All right, Squadron Leader - let's remove the dressing and I'll take out the stitches." As she spoke a young nurse entered the room, wheeling a trolley covered in evil-looking instruments, which she placed on the bed-side cabinet.

"Where's McCoy?" Kirk demanded.

"He'll be along in a minute," Ann Marsh informed him as she washed her hands in the basin by the window.

"When can I get out of here?"

"Are you still grumbling, Jim?" McCoy asked as he entered the room. "All set, Ann?"

"Yes, Leonard, I'm ready."

"Ann, Leonard? What's going on here?" Then Kirk's eyes widened as he saw the scissors and tweezers. "What are those for?"

Ann removed the dressing from Kirk's head; it came away easily. "At least the wound's not weeping any more," she observed.

"Good. Now hold still, Jim, or this will hurt." McCoy stood waiting to start.

"That means it's going to hurt like hell. Can't you do it, Dr. Marsh?"

"Jim."

"What?"

"Shut up, or you'll be here for another ten days, even if I have to make up some rare disease to make it stick," McCoy threatened. Reluctantly, Kirk sat still and quiet. "All right, Ann. You saw me put the stitches in, now you'll see them coming out. Hopefully there won't be too much of a scar." McCoy began to cut the catgut carefully and pull it bit by bit from Kirk's forehead. Kirk bore the tingling, niggling feeling without saying a word. He was slightly surprised that McCoy was doing it himself; after all, this sort of thing had been out of date for years. Ann Marsh observed the procedure very closely, but could see no difference between her method and McCoy's - but the size of the scar was amazing. Instead of the usual large ugly red welt, there was a fine, faintly visible pink line. Ann looked in astonishment at McCoy.

"That's unbelievable!" she gasped.

"Well, my stitching is extremely small, and Jim heals well. All right, Jim - you can get up now, but only light duties for seventy-two hours, and you shouldn't fly until after that." McCoy beckoned the nurse to clear away the trolley.

"You mean you're actually letting me up and out of here?" Kirk asked, surprised.

"Yes, only take it easy, will you? That was a nasty cut. To say nothing of the concussion," Ann replied as she followed the nurse from the room.

Once alone with McCoy, Kirk leaped out of bed. The hospital gown he had been forced to wear covered him adequately at the front, but gaped at the back.

"The sooner I get back on the Enterprise the better," he growled, hunting for his uniform. "Where is it, Bones?"

"Is this what you are looking for, Squadron Leader?"

Kirk had been making so much noise that he hadn't heard Ann Marsh return. "Ah! Er...yes," the Enterprise's Captain replied, trying to draw the ends of the hospital gown closer together.

"Really, Squadron Leader, your modesty amazes me."

"Oh no. What have I been up to now?" Kirk said as he sat down on the bed.

"As you can't remember, I'm not going to tell you," Ann replied.

"Are you going to get dressed, Jim?" McCoy asked.

"Not with..." Kirk gestured wildly.

"Ann, would you mind leaving us - or he'll never get dressed," McCoy asked.

"Certainly." Suddenly Ann realised what it was about Kirk that reminded her of her husband - he had the same easy charm. "I'll be in the office if you should need me." She left the two men together and headed down the corridor.

As she came to McCoy's office, an orderly stopped her. "Dr. Marsh, you're needed at the Cottage Hospital."

"Did they give any details?"

"Only that Mrs. Ross has gone into labour, and Sister Buchan thinks it could be an awkward birth."

"I'm on my way. Could you let Dr. McCoy know? He's with the Squadron Leader. Oh, and let the hospital know I've left, please."

"Yes, Doctor."

They parted company, Ann rushing for her car and the orderly to find Dr. McCoy. He knocked on the door of Kirk's room.

"Come." As he went in McCoy looked at him. "Yes?"

"Dr. Marsh asked me to let you know that she has been called away to the Cottage Hospital to a confinement."

"Thank you." The door closed again behind the orderly.

"The Cottage Hospital? I thought she was one of the Station doctors," Kirk commented as he adjusted his tie.

"No, she's a civilian doctor who's been helping out here."

"So she's not W.A.A.F."

"No, Jim, she's not - and I'm going to have to watch my step with her, or she'll be on to us. You saw how quickly she latched on to the small amount of scarring on your head."

"Yes, I did - and I'd like to know how you managed it, too. I was expecting you to have to remove the scar once we got home again."

"Well, I...er...I brought a field pack with me...just in case of emergencies."

"You mean you actually brought something that could send our cover out the window - and us into the guardhouse at the same time?"

"Don't worry, Jim - it's well hidden."

"Bones... Bones, you really are the limit." Kirk smiled resignedly as he slipped into his jacket.

When Group Captain Crompton received the telephone message that Air Commodore Blake was on his way, he knew that their visitor would cause an upheaval. Every camp tries to present a good, efficient front when visited by someone from High Command, no matter how much stress they are under. Crompton was at panic stations when Kirk was shown into his office. Kirk was surprised at the welcome Crompton gave him; he looked as if he had never been so pleased to see anyone in his life.

"Squadron Leader, please sit down." Kirk watched him closely. "I take it Dr. McCoy has passed you fit?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. We've got a visitor coming from Bomber Command - Air Commodore Blake." The Group Captain spoke as if Kirk should know the name.

"I see." Kirk kept his voice dry.

"I want this camp spotless. We don't have much time - he'll be here by 0900 tomorrow. Have a word with Mr. Bowman; he'll get everything organised. Now, about tonight's dance; the flight crews all have passes. They still stand - but I'm leaving it to you to make sure they all come back to camp sober."

"Yes, sir." Kirk knew he was going to be very popular.

"Don't think I'll be having it easy." Crompton could not mistake the note in Kirk's voice. "I've got to get all this in order." He nodded to the mound of paperwork that covered the top of his desk.

"I can sympathise with you." Kirk thought of the large amount of work that seemed to accumulate on the Enterprise in spite of his best efforts. And it was work he hated, too. He stood. "I'll leave you to it, sir."

He left the office and headed for the hangars; he had a shrewd idea that he

would find Scott there.

Entering the hangar, he saw an airman busy sweeping. "Where's Flight Lieutenant Scott?" he asked briskly.

The young man pointed to a headless figure bent over a dismantled engine. "There, sir. I'm quite capable of fixing the damn thing, but he does everything himself - won't let me touch it," the lad complained.

Kirk allowed himself a slight grin. "He says he's going to be responsible for his own neck?" Without waiting for an answer he crossed to his Chief Engineer.

He stood waiting for a moment before Scott became aware of his presence and looked up. Then he straightened and came to attention, aware of the nearby airman. "Sir."

Kirk glanced at the airman, who took the hint and moved hastily to the end of the hangar. Once he was out of earshot, Kirk explained the situation. Scott's face fell. "You're joking...aren't you?"

"No, Scotty, I'm not."

"You mean I canna...?"

"No. I'm sorry. Oh, you can have a couple of drinks, but..."

Scotty wiped his hands on a rag before he replied. "I'll see to it that everyone gets back safely."

"Thanks." Kirk left him to it and went in search of the Warrant Officer.

* * * * *

Spock stood in the open doorway studying the figure of Nurse Chapel, which was bent over the medical computer. She did not look up. "Come in or go away, but whichever you do, close that door," she snapped.

Spock moved further into the room and the door slid closed.

"That's better." Chapel straightened, looking towards her visitor. "Mr. Spock!" She swallowed. "What can I do for you?"

Spock hesitated, unsure how to put into words what he had in mind. "From what I've heard, I believe you are reasonably good at cosmetic surgery."

"Mr. Spock, before you go any further, I must tell you that Dr. McCoy told me what he said on the bridge that day - and warned me that you had taken it more seriously than he'd intended. But quite frankly, I couldn't do what you want; it would be impossible. Oh, I could alter your ears - but if I did, it wouldn't just be Dr. McCoy who'd have kittens! But to change your blood chemistry from green to red would kill you."

"I did not really think it possible, but..."

"Yes, I know. I'm worried; so is everyone on the ship! Being out of touch like this...it does make one feel helpless..."

Spock nodded. If Starfleet had given them something else to do it might have been different, but they had been left sitting around, waiting for the landing party to return. Abruptly, he turned and headed for the door.

Chapel watched him go, and settled down to her work once more. She found it hard to concentrate; Spock had been giving himself the illusion of doing something by beaming down to visit the Guardian at frequent intervals, and his last visit had left him upset in some way; and that worried Chapel. The Captain held a special place in the hearts of his crew. You had to work with him to understand the effect he had on people - and that effect was magnetic. She was really worried; if something was wrong and the Captain had been hurt... God, the effect on Spock would be unbearable if Kirk should die! No. She pushed that thought out of her mind. If she allowed herself to think along those lines...

she had the utmost faith in Dr. McCoy...and Mr. Scott. They would keep the Captain out of trouble...and alive...

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On the night of the dance, the village pub was totally deserted; most of the regulars were enjoying themselves at the village hall.

Mary the barmaid busied herself shining glasses behind the bar. She did not expect anyone to come in, and if the bar remained empty for another half hour or so she would be able to get off early to join in the fun at the dance.

She was not best pleased when the door opened, but brightened up when she saw the personable officer who entered.

Kirk strolled into the empty bar; his mind registered the fact that the place was deserted. Pleased, he sat on a bar stool; with the Air Commodore arriving in the morning, he needed time to himself to assess the situation before he joined the others at the dance.

"What will it be?" asked Mary.

He grinned wryly. "What's the selection? Gin or beer?" At her nod, he said, "I'll have a double gin and a pint, please."

"Aren't you going to the dance?" she asked as she pulled his pint.

"Later," he replied, taking it. The log fire burning in the hearth at the opposite end of the room drew him like a moth. He lifted his drinks and crossed to it. Sinking into a seat, he cradled his pint, his mind slowly turning back towards the expected visit of the Air Commodore.

He finished the pint quickly, and gestured the barmaid, who poured him another one.

The dance was in full flow when Kirk entered. The music they were playing deafened him; it made talking impossible, so he let his eyes wander around. Scott was propping up the bar (or was it the other way round? No - Scotty was on duty and would resist temptation.) The rest of his men were on the dance floor - apart from McCoy, who was nowhere to be seen. That was odd; they had agreed to meet here. Kirk became aware of a dull ache in the back of his head. The loud music didn't help.

"He got tied up in paperwork," a female voice said from his left side.

"I beg your pardon?" He turned to face the owner of the voice. Ann Marsh was standing beside him. For the first time he realised just how beautiful she was; her eyes held him like magnets and he found he could not draw them away from her.

"Leonard phoned to say that he would be late - if he got here at all," she smiled.

"Phoned." Kirk knew he sounded stupid, but he just could not picture McCoy using a phone.

"Yes - he phoned to say he'd be late, and asked me to keep an eye on you."

"He would." Kirk's right hand rubbed his temple.

"Are you all right?" Her medical training took over.

"Just a headache," he informed her. His colour had paled visibly.

"You were told to take things easy today." She sounded just like McCoy as she slipped her arm through his and led him through the crowd to the back of the hall and into a small room. Her doctor's bag lay on the table. She crossed to it and took out a small bottle of pills. She turned to Kirk. "These should help." She handed two tiny white pills over.

"What are they?" Kirk asked suspiciously before he took them.

"Just two pain-killers. Now open your mouth and take them." She watched him turning them over in his hand. "Now what?"

"I can't swallow them without water," he pointed out, smiling.

"Well, there's a sink and a tap. If you turn it, water flows out." She pointed to a sink at the other side of the room. "Now - I thought McCoy gave you strict orders to take things easy today "

"Yes, he did - but we're getting a top brass visitor tomorrow, so it's been all go," he told her as he swallowed the pills. "As a senior officer, I was roped in to make sure everything'd be in proper order."

"So that's what's been causing all the panic today." She sat on the wooden bench that ran along the wall by the window.

"Yes - you could say that someone pushed the panic button. Kirk's soft accent came over quite plainly.

"You're Canadian." She sounded surprised.

"Is it that obvious?" Kirk's mind was racing; McCoy was right, Ann was quick on the uptake. It was lucky that she automatically assumed that anyone in the British Forces who had a transatlantic accent would be Canadian. "Hey, those pills work fast. Would you believe my headache is almost gone? How about a dance?"

"All right."

Kirk needed no lessons on how to dance; he had lost count of the number of times he had used that particular skill at diplomatic functions. Silently he took her round the dance floor, moving with easy grace.

"Jim, are you all right?" she asked after a while, worried by his silence.

"Yes, I'm fine."

"Let's sit the next one out, please. My feet are killing me."

"Oh - I'm sorry, it was inconsiderate of me not to realise; you are on your feet all day, aren't you." He led her off the dance floor to a vacant table, drew her seat out, and hesitated before he too sat down. "Would you like a drink?"

"Yes, please. Gin and tonic, please - if there's any left!"

"I hope there is. I could do with one myself."

"You know you shouldn't mix drink with drugs," she told him.

"It shouldn't make any difference - I'd already had a drink before I came here. One more shouldn't hurt."

She watched him cross to the bar, a slight frown between her brows; he was walking steadily enough, but her doctor's eye noted the signs of approaching intoxication, and she knew that if she did not get him back to base soon, he would probably pass out from the combination of drink and the very potent drug she had given him.

It seemed, though, that he too had realised his condition. He moved carefully back through the dancing couples, careful not to spill any of the liquid in the two glasses he carried. He placed them carefully on the table. "When you've finished your drink, Ann, I'll walk you home if you like." His voice was ever so slightly slurred.

"All right," she agreed. "But how are you going to get back?"

"The walk will do me good."

Ann had her doubts.

The cold evening air hit them as they left the village hall. Ann was glad of the comforting arm that slipped round her waist and drew her close. Her tweed coat gave her protection from the evening breeze, and for that she was glad.

The cold wind bit into Kirk's lungs; swamping dizziness hit behind his eyes. He breathed deeply, attempting to clear his head, but it was a mistake. He felt sick and tried to move towards something solid, which as it happened turned out to be a lamppost. He stepped towards it, slipped, lost his balance and made contact with a resounding thump on his left shoulder. He clung to the lamppost as if his life depended on it.

"Jim!" Ann exclaimed anxiously.

"I'm... Oh, God, I'm going to be sick."

Finally he looked up. "Sorry," he managed to say.

"My fault," she replied. "I should have realised you'd already had a drink. I shouldn't have given you those tablets. They're what did the damage." She slipped her arm round his waist. "It's just as well I live just up here."

She helped him the short distance to her home. Once inside she led him into the living room where he made himself comfortable in the chair by the fire.

"I'll make some coffee," she said as she removed her coat, laying it over the back of the settee.

"I still feel sick."

"Well, you're not going to be sick in here." She hauled him to his feet, helped him to the toilet and got her bed ready for him. One thing was sure; he was in no fit state to return to the station, and she blamed herself again for giving him the tablets.

Once she had the bed ready she moved to the linen cupboard, removing the blankets she needed to make up the bed settee for herself. With everything ready she went back to the toilet. She listened outside the door; when she heard nothing she tapped gently. There was no answer; she pushed the door open to discover him lying on the floor unconscious.

Instantly her medical training took over. She checked his pulse. Erratic, but no more than she would have expected in someone who had just consumed a mixture of gin and a powerful painkiller. With great difficulty, she managed to move him through to the bedroom and heaved him onto the bed. She looked down at him for a moment, then began to remove his uniform. To anyone watching it would have been obvious that she was no stranger to this task. She stripped him down to his shorts, hesitated, then left them on him; this man who lay in her bed was not the husband who had drunk himself insensible as often as he could after a hard mission. Silently she covered him with the bedclothes, and in one sweeping movement she switched off the light and went into the livingroom, where she undressed and got into bed.

Next morning, she filled the bath with piping hot water - with the fire burning all night the water had been kept hot. After finishing her bath she slipped her dressing gown on around her naked body. The clothes she needed were in the bedroom. She listened at the door; there was no sound except a gentle snore. The grandfather clock in the hall struck seven.

A top brass visitor. The thought flashed through her mind. Reveille had been almost an hour ago; she had to get him awake and back to camp within the next half hour or so. If she didn't...

Taking a deep breath she entered the room. Kirk was still sleeping. She smiled as she switched the light on. Kirk woke abruptly.

"What the..." he started to say. As he sat up he realised that the bed he was in was neither his own bunk back on the Enterprise or at the R.A.F. camp...

and secondly, he was almost naked...and there was a woman in the room.

"Awake?" Ann asked.

"Oh, hell," Kirk muttered. "Ann..." He fell silent, his mind working busily and not liking the answers it came up with.

"Feeling any better this morning?" she asked.

"What sort of time is it?"

"Seven."

"Oh, shit. The Air Commodore!" Kirk leaped out of bed. "My uniform..."

"I'll get you one of my husband's," she replied, hurrying to the wardrobe. "You're about the same size. Yours got rather messed up last night." She pulled out a clean uniform. "Jim -- after last night's carry on, I'd lay off the drink for a while."

"Yes, I think you're right." Privately, he was inclined to blame the gin for upsetting him.

"The shirts are in the top drawer," she informed him as she moved to the door, her own clothes over her arm. "Want any breakfast?"

He shuddered. "No."

"I didn't think you would."

By the time Kirk had washed, shaved and dressed, Ann had cleared away any evidence that she had slept in the living room. It was not that she intended to imply that she had slept with him, but her housekeeper would be in at ten and if she had to clear away the bed settee, it would be all round the village in no time that Dr. Marsh had had someone staying with her the night of the dance, and she did not want that. It didn't occur to her that Jim Kirk had, in the absence of positive memory, formed his own first impressions of the situation.

They drove the short distance to the camp in silence. Kirk had the window rolled down in a useless attempt to clear his head. Ann dropped him at the air-field and headed for the base hospital. The time was eight o'clock; Kirk covered the short distance to the control tower with long, purposeful strides. Anyone who crossed him this morning would certainly feel the sharp edge of his tongue!

McCoy, in a panic over the forthcoming visit, was causing total confusion in his efforts to organise the hospital into some sort of visitable state.

"Good grief, man, cover that instrument trolley! Haven't you heard of germs? And wrap that lot of bandages again -- one puff of wind and the whole lot will be unravelled!"

"Yes, Doctor." The white-clad orderly was about to turn towards the trolley which McCoy had just mentioned when the bandages were equally anxiously pointed out. McCoy rushed from the room and fell headlong over the mop and bucket which another orderly had had brought out to clean the corridor floor. The echo of the crash and the resulting cursing could be heard through half the hospital. Ann Marsh, who had just entered the main corridor, had her eardrums nearly shattered by McCoy's expletives. Rounding the corner she encountered McCoy sprawled across the floor, a wet mop stuck under his chin like a home-grown beard. His right foot seemed to have been to a shoe shop where the assistant had a sense of humour, for it now sported a metal bucket. She felt the laughter welling up inside and tried to suppress the fit of giggles, but it was useless; the picture in front of her was too funny. As her laughter burst upon the now silent corridor, McCoy turned, an indignant retort forming on his lips. Luckily, he began to laugh too as the funny side of his predicament occurred to him.

Their laughter finally subsiding, Ann managed to gasp out the one question she was dying to have answered. "Leonard -- what on earth are you...doing?"

"I'm inventing a new disguise for cleaners. What do you think I'm doing!? I came out of that damn door and shot straight into this lot!"

"Oh." She chuckled again. "Sorry."

"Not half as sorry as the twit who left it there will be when I get my hands on him!"

"Now are you sure it wasn't just a little bit your own fault for rushing about?"

"Rushing about! Good grief - the inspection!"

"Don't worry. You get off and change, and I'll deal with the rest."

"You sure?"

"Of course I am. Off you go."

McCoy loped off at a trot round the bend in the direction of his office. Ann got to grips with the mess left behind. As she cleared up she managed to suppress recurring fits of laughter as the vision of McCoy returned to her again and again. Those orderlies who came on her when she was chuckling again went away wondering silently what had caused the usually cool Dr. Marsh to turn into a giggling schoolgirl.

The morning was still grey as the full complement of Blackhill was mustered by flights and squadrons on the parade ground. Air Commodore Blake's plane had just landed and was at that moment rolling to a halt. He alighted with the minimum of fuss and stood gazing at the ranks gathered before him.

Kirk and the rest of the men kept a semblance of rigidity while the Station Commander moved forward to greet his V.I.P. guest. Kirk could only imagine what would have happened if Starfleet Academy had ever done away with its rigid drill programme; for one thing he and his men would have been hopelessly lost in the ritual preceding the visitor's arrival.

The Air Commodore exchanged salutes with the Station Commander and both men moved back towards the assembled men. It was at this point that Kirk got his first really good look at their visitor, and nearly gasped out loud in disbelief.

"Spock?" he mouthed.

The rest of the Enterprise men looked on in equal amazement as the two senior officers reached Kirk.

"Well, George - I understand the replacement for Squadron Leader Marsh is this young man," Blake said.

"Yes, sir. Squadron Leader Kirk."

Kirk had been staring at Blake during the brief exchange. It was uncanny - the likeness between this man his First Officer. Only three things set them apart; Spock's eyebrows, ears and the green hue of his skin. This man did not have any of Spock's physical differences. Kirk dragged his mind back to the present as the Air Commodore addressed him.

Kirk saluted smartly as he had been taught at Starfleet Academy; the salute was returned in the same smart manner. "Good to meet you, Squadron Leader." The Air Commodore extended his hand.

"Thank you, sir." Kirk took the extended hand.

"Tell me, what is your opinion of the new aircraft? I believe your Flight Engineer has been quite handy in dealing with a few technical hitches?"

Was this why the Air Commodore was here? "I think the Lancaster will be one of the most influential planes of the war - now that Flight Lieutenant Scott has put his seal of approval on the engine!" Kirk's sight was a marvellous commodity.

"Quite. You must introduce me to this genius."

"Yes, sir." Kirk saluted the senior officer once again. The salute was returned. Kirk followed the Air Commodore and the Station Commander as they moved off to inspect his men, reflecting that some things never change and glad that official inspections were usually few and far between.

Scott was first in line. He stood completely motionless. "Flight Lieutenant Scott, sir."

"Ah -- so you are the person responsible for the reorganisation of the bomber production." The Air Commodore gave Scott a searching look.

"Aye, sir."

"Tell me, what was the fault?"

"They had the width of a wee inflow pipe wrong. The width it was didna' give the correct flow, sir."

"Yes, I see. Well done! I hope we won't have quite so many losses now." Blake extended his hand; Scotty took it, and snapped back to attention.

The Air Commodore and his retinue made their slow progress through the ranks. At last they reached the last file and Blake requested that they go straight to the hospital instead of seeking refreshment first. Kirk accompanied the Air Commodore and the Group Captain in Crompton's staff car.

Once the car was out of sight the parade was dismissed. One could almost feel the scurry of feet as the men made their way back to their various duties. A quick phone call alerted the hospital that the visitor was on his way.

As the car set off on the three mile journey, Blake complimented Crompton on the turnout of his men. Kirk felt that the C.O. might begin preening himself like a peacock at any second. He could also think of a few people back at Starfleet who, in a similar situation, would be down on their hands and knees licking boots by now, and he was glad that he was 'serving' under a man who was above such petty toadying. He wondered if Ann Marsh had been invited to the dinner that the camp was putting on on behalf of the Air Commodore. If not, he would have to try to find a moment later to speak to her. He thought of the hospital and smiled slightly; he couldn't imagine what McCoy would say when he came face to face with their visitor!

"Isn't that correct, Jim... Jim!" The C.O. tapped Kirk on the shoulder.

Kirk shook himself. "Sorry, sir, I'm afraid my mind had wandered. What was it, sir?"

"I was just remarking that Dr. McCoy will be delighted to have us tour the hospital."

"Oh, I'm sure he will, sir. In fact, I'm positive he will find the visit very...enlightening." Kirk nodded enthusiastically.

Ann Marsh, with the help of some orderlies, had the hospital in pristine condition and as neat as a new pin in no time at all. McCoy came back to the main examination room, having changed his clothes, to find all the work completed and the place looking immaculate.

"Ann, you know how to work a miracle or two! Remind me to show you my appreciation later on."

"That's very kind of you, Leonard. I'm glad to see that you've recovered from your little...mishap." Ann managed to repress a grin, but could not conceal the twinkle in her eye.

McCoy grinned and shrugged. "Well, we can't all be light on our feet."

At that moment, an orderly knocked on the door and announced the arrival of

their guests.

"Ann, check my tie, will you please? I feel all fingers and thumbs. I hate visits from the Hierarchy!" McCoy had gone slightly pale; he looked very shaky.

"Come on, Leonard, they can't eat you, you know."

"Are you sure about that? Anyway, I'm glad you're with me."

"Really?"

They moved towards the entrance hall to welcome their guests.

The three officers had just stepped from their car and had turned towards the entrance of the hospital when McCoy and Ann Marsh pushed through the swing doors. McCoy was making a hasty effort to salute the Air Commodore when his eyes focused on the face of their visitor. The arm, halfway to a salute, turned to stone and refused to allow the completion of the greeting. Kirk grinned behind his hand, which he coughed into as meaningfully as he could. McCoy's face could not really be described as thunderstruck - perhaps a more accurate description would be that of a man completely poleaxed. His mouth had dropped open, his eyes round and incredulous. Ann, watching this phenomenon, discreetly dug him in the ribs. McCoy gathered his wits and completed the salute. "Wel...welcome, sir."

Air Commodore Blake, having returned the salute, greeted McCoy with a firm handshake. As he leaned nearer, the Doctor whispered, "Good grief, Spock, I didn't think Nurse Chapel had it in her! She's done a very nice job on those ears. You must have wanted to come quite badly."

The Air Commodore stepped back, looking quite perplexed. "I realise how overworked you must be at the hospital, Doctor. Perhaps you have confused me with a patient?"

"Come on, Spock, I'd know you anywhere!" Sheer relief was making McCoy babble on, momentarily forgetting their role here.

Blake was beginning to look slightly annoyed, and Kirk thought it was about time he stopped McCoy from making any more blunders. Stepping from behind the Group Captain into full view of his friend, Kirk began shaking his head frantically from side to side. The movement caught McCoy's eye and he realised his mistake; he turned a sickly shade of green, shutting up quickly.

The C.O., also realising that Blake was becoming irritated but without any understanding of why McCoy was behaving so oddly, stepped forward as well. "I say, Dr. McCoy, don't you think we could get on round the hospital? How's young Spratt? Not too bad now, I hope."

"No." McCoy swallowed, still nervous, but the question had steadied him. "He's recovering nicely. You will see him on our tour."

Ann Marsh was flashing signals with her eyes towards Kirk; she wanted to know just what all the byplay meant. Kirk just winked and strode after the Air Commodore, the Group Captain and McCoy.

The inspection over, the Air Commodore departed with the C.O. and Kirk for a conference in Crompton's office, his feathers neatly smoothed by the immaculate condition of the hospital. For a while it had been obvious that he had had suspicions of McCoy's sanity - after all, no really sane man would have rabbitted on the way he had - but by the end of the tour he had decided to reserve judgement on the Doctor until a later date.

Crompton's office was no different from hundreds of other offices in countless camps throughout the country. The rather shabby desk and chair were not exactly what one might expect a Group Captain to have in his office, but Crompton felt comfortable with them. They were not standard issue but his own property, a birthday present from his wife some years previously. The rest of the room held a large green filing cabinet, two more chairs, and there was a small rug on the

floor between the door and the desk. The Group Captain opened the door and ushered in the Air Commodore and Kirk.

"Can I order some tea for you?"

"Thank you, George, that would be most acceptable. I'm sure Squadron Leader Kirk and yourself would also like one?"

"Well, actually I'd prefer coffee if that all right with you, sir," Kirk said.

"By all means. I'll just chase up one of the W.A.A.F.s to get it - excuse me a moment, sir." He closed his office door and went off in search of someone to make the tea and coffee. His secretary, a highly efficient girl, was on the sick list and he missed her badly.

Both the Air Commodore and Kirk had been silent for some seconds after the C.O. left the room, and now they both began to talk at once.

"Well, sir..." / "Squadron Leader, I'm..."

Kirk grinned ruefully. "After you, sir."

Blake smiled. "Squadron Leader, I have a mission of a very difficult nature to assign. It seems to me that your squadron is just the one to tackle it."

"Good sir - I would like to get moving. After all, that's what we're here for."

Crompton came back into the office just in time to hear Kirk's comment. "Does that mean we're in business, sir?"

"Yes, George, it does."

"It's about time. What's the use of having a special unit and not using it to its full capacity?"

"We were using you until Squadron Leader Marsh was killed," Blake reminded him.

"I know - but the quicker we get on with the war, the quicker it'll be over and the fewer lives will be lost." Neither of his listeners could disagree with that.

"Right," Blake began. "You are no doubt aware that our attempt at bombing the heavy water factory in Norway was a total failure. We managed to destroy most of the town, but very little of the factory. In fact, it's a wonder the local resistance is still speaking to our intelligence."

"Quite, sir. It must have been pretty awful for them," Crompton agreed.

"Yes, it was bad. Not an exploit to boast about. However, we mean to try again; it's vital to get that factory out of commission. The idea this time is to have a two-pronged attack to create a bit of confusion; the main mission will look to the Germans like a straightforward bombing of Stavanger in an attempt to disable a major seaport, but in reality the most important part will be a single Stirling bomber towing a glider with fifty commandos to a touchdown point somewhere north of Bjukan. There the unit will join up with our resistance friends in that area. They will lead our group to the factory so that charges can be planted in the places that we have calculated will cause the most damage. Also we've been informed that a British scientist has been helping the Germans with the distillation of heavy water, although nobody seems to know where he came from. The Whitehall bods want him."

Kirk's ears pricked. The Whitehall 'bods' weren't the only ones who wanted that particular scientist!

"Heavy water?" Crompton asked.

"It's the layman's term for deuterium oxide, sir," Kirk replied. "It has a heavier hydrogen structure than ordinary water."

"Thank you, Squadron Leader." Blake looked impressed. "I gather you know some physics?"

"Just the basics, sir. May I ask a question?"

"I presume that the raid would conclude our part of the mission?"

"Yes, Squadron Leader. However, getting home again isn't a piece of cake either - remember that anyone shot down in the North Sea stands little chance of surviving more than fifteen minutes."

"Then may I make a suggestion, sir?" Kirk hoped that he sounded eager rather than devious.

"Certainly."

"I suggest that a Lancaster be assigned to act as escort for the Stirling and its companion, due to the fact that the Stirling's fighting capability will be reduced by towing a glider."

"Mmm. Yes, Squadron Leader, you have a point there."

"Thank you, sir."

They were interrupted by a discreet tap on the door, and a young W.A.A.F entered with their drinks. She had even managed to obtain some biscuits to go with the tea and coffee.

"Thank you. Put the tray on my desk, please. Tell me, how did you manage to find those biscuits?"

She flushed. "Er...that's a trade secret, sir. Will that be all?"

"Thank you." Crompton made a mental note to transfer this girl to his personal staff.

"I understand that I'm to be guest of honour at a dinner tonight, George?" Blake obviously believed in small talk over even a casual cup of tea.

"Yes. I hope you didn't have anything else planned for the evening."

Kirk sipped his coffee in silence, his mind not on what the two senior officers, who were clearly old acquaintances if not friends, were discussing. Could he find the time to get back to the hospital to ask Ann if she would accompany him to the dinner that evening. No - phoning would be a lot easier. Putting down his cup, he requested permission to carry on with his normal duties. It was granted, and he left the two officers discussing old times, with the odd feeling that they were glad of the chance to relax with no subordinates, even a Squadron Leader, around. He went into his own office. Picking up the phone, he first dialled the guardroom to request a message be passed on to his crew to report to his office as soon as possible. Then he phoned the hospital. He hoped that it would be Ann and not McCoy who answered the phone; he didn't feel up to a lecture from his Chief Medical Officer on the dangers of getting involved with someone from another time. Anyway, he wasn't getting involved; he was just being friendly.

The ringing of the phone interrupted Ann Marsh as she was trying to concentrate on a case file she was updating. Feeling slightly irritated, she lifted the receiver. "Yes?" The peremptory word was snapped out quite fiercely.

"Wow, if I'd known you were in a bad mood I wouldn't have disturbed you."

She recognised the Canadian overtones. "Sorry, Jim, but I do happen to be busy at the moment. McCoy's doing ward rounds."

"It's not McCoy I want, it's you. I won't keep you long - I just wondered if you would care to accompany me to the officer's mess for the dinner tonight."

"It's very kind of you to ask me, but I'm not sure..."

"Come on, Ann. You should get out more and enjoy yourself. Yes, I know it's not that long since your husband died, but moping won't bring him back."

"I keep telling myself that. All right. I'd love to go."

"Good. What time will I pick you up?"

"You won't. I'm on call, so I'll need my car with me. What time will they be starting?"

"Probably about seven."

"Then I'll meet you at the gate at half past six. Promise me one thing."

"Anything."

"Don't drink anything." She rang off quickly and turned her attention back to the case history. Just as she was finishing, McCoy walked in.

"Still hard at it?" he enquired.

"Just finished. If it's O.K. with you I'll get off home now."

"Yes, you're on call tonight, aren't you. You'd better leave a number where we can contact you." Even as he spoke he knew that the comment was unnecessary. Ann Marsh knew the rules -- probably better than he did.

"I'll be on camp at the dinner." Seeing the questioning look on McCoy's face, she added, "Jim Kirk invited me."

"Oh. He did, did he?"

"Is something wrong?"

"No, Ann. There's nothing wrong." McCoy made a mental note to speak to Kirk as soon as possible. It would do neither of them any good to become too friendly; Kirk had to return home, and Ann had already lost one man to the war. For the first time McCoy really wished that Spock could have accompanied them; Kirk would accept his advice when he would query anyone else's. However, it was too late to do anything about it tonight -- but he would seize the first chance he could to tackle the Captain. He smiled at Ann. "Off you go then, and make yourself beautiful. We can't have you letting the medical profession down!"

"Thanks. I love you, too." With that parting shot Ann left the office. McCoy looked at the pile of case notes to be written up, and inwardly groaning he sat down and began to write. There was far too much to do before he too would be able to dress ready for the dinner.

The image that stared out of the mirror at Kirk made him flush with embarrassment. He had never felt so...so dandified in his whole life. The snow-white shirt, black dickie-bow below the chin, would usually have been enough, but the R.A.F. dress uniform also included a bright red dinner jacket, a black silk cummerbund, black trousers with a silk stripe down the side seams, and completing the outfit, shoes whose shininess produced nearly as good an image as the mirror on the inside of his wardrobe.

The silence was broken by mixed grunts, groans and muttered expletives from the room next to Kirk's. The reflection, which a moment ago had stared embarrassedly back at him, now grinned broadly, for he knew that the occupant of the room next to his was none other than Dr. McCoy. Closing the door of the wardrobe, he moved to the door, intent on discovering the reason for the commotion.

The door was open. Kirk leaned against the jamb surveying the scene before him. McCoy and Scott stood facing each other, their hands busy fumbling at each other's throats, the object of their joint irritation seeming to be the black bow ties which appeared as tangled masses beneath their chins.

"Well, gentlemen -- what on earth are you trying to do?"

"Ach, Captain. It's these black...contraptions. We've been trying for half an hour and more to get them tied!"

"Scotty's right, Jim. How on earth any man is expected to get these confounded things to look like... How did you get yours to look like that???" Both men stared intently at the Captain's tie.

"Weren't you two ever in the boy scouts?" Kirk grinned, amused by the expressions on the two faces.

"Would it be too much to ask you to help a couple of deprived souls who haven't had the benefit of your illustrious upbringing?" McCoy asked with a sweetness that was in itself a subtle insult.

"But of course," Kirk replied expansively. "Can't have you appearing in the mess looking a mess -- could we?" Both officers looked indignant at the pun and seeing that his amusement was no longer acceptable, Kirk stifled his laughter and deftly tied both ties with a minimum of fuss. "Well, now we are all sorted out, I'm going to meet Ann at the guard house. I'm sorry I laughed, but you did look funny."

"It didn't seem funny to us, sir," Scott grunted, but he had at least begun to smile slightly. McCoy, on the other hand, was still muttering about not wanting to come on the mission in the first place never mind dressing up like a duck in season. Kirk grinned again as he turned away and moved off towards the main door.

Back at her cottage Ann stood back from her dressing table mirror. She had finally decided on a black figure-hugging dress that she had bought before the war. This was the first time for a while that she had felt the occasion warranted the use of makeup, too. Smiling, she picked up her car keys and handbag, and left the room. She had taken more time than usual over her appearance tonight, and if she didn't hurry now she would be late.

The engine of her Austin seven roared into life, and she set off. The night was clear and the moon shone brightly, making the road ahead resemble a silver river quietly winding its way through the Scottish countryside.

The young airman standing guard in the sentrybox at the main gate rubbed his hands together vigorously. His breath condensed as soon as it left his mouth, producing a minor fog that was clearly seen in the frosty night air.

Kirk strolled out into the cold, placing his hands in his trouser pockets as he moved at a brisk pace towards the main gate. The sentry stood smartly to attention at his approach.

"Stand easy, lad, you're not in for an inspection, just some friendly conversation." Kirk smiled at the young man, who reminded him of a friendly young ensign back on the Enterprise.

"Yes, sir. Nice night -- a bomber's moon if I ever saw one."

"Yes, indeed. I wouldn't like to be in London or Berlin tonight." Kirk had been reading of the raids each night by both Britain and Germany, and the many towns and cities laid waste by the nightly raids. The reports in the newspapers, censored though he was sure they were, were more telling than the cold academic reports in the history books.

The slight breeze blowing over the camp brought every night sound to the two standing by the gate. The mournful hoot of an owl crying in the dark trees as it sought out its next victim... The growl of an engine broke the near-silence as a set of shaded headlights peeped out around the bend in the road. Both men turned to watch the approach of the Doctor's Austin. Pulling up at the gate, Ann was pleased that Kirk was already there, waiting for her.

Although he knew her, the sentry knew his duty, and in the presence of a senior officer he would not skimp it. "Evening, Ma'm, can I see your pass please?"

"Certainly." Ann Marsh had it ready. "I hope you won't be out here all

night without a hot drink -- and you should be wearing gloves." She looked reprovingly at the young airman.

"Yes. Ma'm. You may proceed."

"Thank you." She took her papers back from him and unlocked the passenger door for Kirk.

"I'm sure he's due off duty soon," Kirk said as he took his seat.

She drove off slowly, carefully observing the camp's speed limit. A minute later, Kirk said, "Just pull the car in over there, then it'll be handy if you need it but won't get in the way if we have an emergency."

Ann nodded and pulled the car into the indicated space. Once parked, however, she made no attempt to get out of her seat. Kirk gave her a moment, then said, "Ann? We should be getting in."

"Yes...I suppose so. It's just...I haven't been here since Andy died." She got out quickly, and slipped her arm through his before they walked into the officer's mess.

McCoy and Scott stood by the bar. As usual, Scott had not been idle, and he had quickly discovered that the barman had a bottle of malt whisky tucked away beneath the bar; and while McCoy preferred brandy, he was not averse to joining his friend in a whisky.

"You've got something on your mind, haven't you?" Scott asked after a minute.

"I'm a bit worried that Jim's becoming too fond of Ann Marsh," McCoy admitted.

"I don't think the Captain's that stupid."

"No? He was the only one who didn't get back from the dance last night -- and his bed wasn't slept in. Then he turns up looking like a pressed suit at the inspection this morning, grinning from one ear to the other. To be honest, Scotty, I don't think he could stand to... Well, you saw for yourself what he was like after Edith Keeler died. I know I didn't help matters that time... And there's Ann, too. Her husband's not long dead; I wouldn't like her to get too attached to someone else who's going to -- well, disappear." He remembered to keep his voice very low.

"I dinna think the Captain'll leave himsel' open to the same thing again. Not on this mission."

"I hope you're right, Scotty. After all, we're here to keep an eye on him, so to speak...but I would like to know where he got to last night!"

The object of their conversation made a sweeping entrance behind them, Ann Marsh on his arm. He could feel her tension, so he drew her closer in an attempt to give her confidence. She turned towards him, smiling her gratitude.

McCoy saw, and prayed that Kirk knew what he was doing. Several people were now smiling greetings as they saw Ann. She returned their smiles as Kirk ushered her over to join Scott and McCoy at the bar.

"Bones, Scotty, what will it be? Ann?" Kirk registered the worried look on McCoy's face and wondered what the trouble was.

"I'll have a gin and tonic, please," Ann answered.

"We'll have whisky," Scott said innocently.

McCoy was quite surprised that when Kirk ordered the drinks he stuck to a soft drink for himself. Even Scott's eyebrows lifted. "Ye canna beat a good malt on a cold night for keeping away the cold."

"You'd find a good excuse to drink it any time, Scotty," McCoy chuckled. "Not having one, Jim?"

"No - after last night I promised Ann I'd stay on the wagon tonight," Kirk replied without thinking. He did not know that McCoy already knew he had not returned to camp the night before. This only added to McCoy's suspicions.

"There's nothing wrong wi' a wee drop o' golden nectar now and then." Scott could not conceive of a good reason for not having a drink if he wanted one. Not to get drunk, of course, not on duty - but one drink, or even two, never did any harm.

As the drinks were placed in front of them, Kirk winked. Holding up his glass of orange juice, he gave a toast. "Well, gentlemen, I think this is a good time to drink to...an Enterprising future."

Ann Marsh looked on, knowing that somehow she had been excluded.

As they finished their drinks, Crompton and the Air Commodore walked in. This was the signal for everyone to move into the dining room. They were seated at two tables which were arranged to form a capital T. Crompton, Blake, Kirk, Ann, McCoy, Scott (as the engineer responsible for the improvements to the Lancasters) were among the officers grouped at the top table. Crompton smiled encouragingly at Ann, glad to see that she was recovering enough from the shock of her husband's death to begin socialising again. The meal progressed steadily, with conversation flowing between courses; how the war was going, the latest shortages, what new plays or films were currently showing.

"You know, it hasn't changed much since Andy's death," Ann said, sounding almost surprised. "Even most of the personnel are the same... Where did you say you were stationed before you came here?"

"I didn't, but it was at Lindholme, north of Doncaster. Do you know it?" Kirk thanked God he had been given the opportunity to read over the records of the other crews in the squadron.

"No, I don't."

"It's where they do the H.C." Ann looked perplexed. "Sorry, I forgot you aren't in the W.A.A.F. H.C. stands for Heavy Conversion - it's the unit that trains crews for large bombers."

"What's it like there?" Ann asked.

"A large prison camp. You have to do all sorts of dreadful things - like P.T." Kirk grinned.

McCoy had been listening silently to the conversation, wondering how Kirk had known about the other camp and at the same time envying him for being able to play his part so convincingly.

"I think that's quite enough shop talk." McCoy gallantly changed the subject. "You're looking particularly lovely tonight." There, that was a less dangerous topic.

"Why, thank you, Leonard. It's just an old thing, nothing special." Ann blushed.

"Just like a woman. They all say that when you ask them to go out - they 'have nothing to wear'," Scott put in from the other side of McCoy. They laughed; he looked so comically resigned. He had been placed next to the W.A.A.F. officer in charge, who had persistently asked him to pass this and pass that - and anything else she might need - all through the meal.

Before anything else could be said, Group Captain Crompton stood up. "Ladies and gentlemen, I should like you to give a warm welcome to Air Commodore Blake who, as guest of honour, is about to sing for his supper, so to speak."

Everyone applauded as Blake thanked Crompton and rose to his feet. Kirk sighed. No doubt they would be in for one long, boring speech, if Starfleet dinners were anything to go by. And the Air Commodore would probably try to prove himself 'one of the lads' by including a couple of dirty jokes, watered down slightly out of deference to the ladies, towards the end of his speech.

He let his mind wander. If this speech was anything to go by, the only resemblance between this man and Spock was physical.

The planes were all refitted by now, and training began in earnest. At 0800 next day the men were called to the briefing room. As they assembled in small groups, speculation arose about the new training schedules. Silence fell as Crompton, Kirk and the Intelligence Officer entered. The body of men stood to attention then as the officers reached the Dias, the Group Captain motioned them to sit.

"Gentlemen, you have been called here today to hear a little about your schedule for the next few days. Squadron Leader Kirk, if you please?"

"Yes, sir." Kirk was grateful that briefings had not really changed over the years. He was used to a little less formality, that was all. "Right, let's get down to business. In the next few days, we will be spending every available minute in the air, practising every manoeuvre in the book - plus some that are not quite standard." Kirk finished the sentence to the accompaniment of loud groans. He could sympathise; these men wanted action, not more training. "Quiet, please. The survival of the group - and the success of the mission - depends on absolute accuracy."

One Flight Sergeant sitting in the centre of the room slowly raised his hand.

"Yes?" Kirk questioned, hoping - not for the first time - that he would be able to answer the question.

"Are we allowed to know what and where we are going to be bombing, sir?"

Kirk glanced at Crompton, who nodded. "You will be bombing a certain Norwegian port."

"What's so special about that, sir? We've all done that type of run before."

"Yes, most of us have; but this time there's a difference, which at the moment I'm not at liberty to divulge."

With the briefing over, the crews went to the stores to draw out the survival equipment they would need for the flights; parachutes, etc. Kirk and the Group Captain left the briefing room together and headed for the C.O.'s office.

"If you need anything, Jim, let me know. I don't want anything to go wrong with this mission, or the unit may find itself on the scrapheap before its had a chance to show what it's really capable of doing."

"Believe me, sir, I'm well aware of the importance of this mission."

"Good luck, Jim." Crompton wished that he too was going, but he was Group Captain and in command of the station. Rank had its advantages - but also some disadvantages, and the biggest of those was flying a desk.

Exactly half an hour later the merlins of Kirk's Lancaster were in steady song, the propellers, with the blades like canoe paddles scything the air. Kirk rolled her along the winding taxiway to the take off marshalling point; twitching the brake lever on and off, he brought E for Echo (covertly changed to E for Enterprise) to a halt. He and Scott went through the controls check list.

"Throttles. Check."

"Set on a thousand."

"Trims, elevator two notches nose down."

"Elevators and aileron trims neutral."

"Supercharger."

"M gear."

"Pitch."

"Fully fine and locked."

"Pitot heater on fuel."

"Contents checked, master cocks on cross feed off boosters on."

"Flaps."

"One third down and reading."

"Gills."

"Air intake cold, rad shutters auto."

"Clutch in, cock out. Gyro compass set."

While Kirk and Scott were going through the required check list of their equipment, the other members of the crew were making final adjustments to their own apparatus. Kirk noticed the green light flashing from the caravan; the signal to take off. Releasing the brakes, he started the Lancaster forward. Like an impatient lady she shot into the air. The engine guages showed eighteen pounds of boost when Kirk pushed the throttles through the take off gate. As she climbed slowly over Blackhill, Kirk felt her, vibrant and responsive in his hands. The 'Enterprise' circled around the airfield waiting for her fellows to join her. It took almost half an hour to get all ten planes airborne. As they moved into formation and headed away from the airfield, peace and quiet fell once more over the base.

Kirk led his men away across the countryside and over the coast to the North Sea. He would keep them practising formation flying, gunnery umbrella protection, dummy runs, etc, for the next two hours; everything they needed to survive. The practice would do his own crew good, for they, most of all, needed to put on a good show.

McCoy had heard the planes take off. He knew that it would be very unlikely that he would be seeing much of Kirk in the next few days, for, as far as he could gather from the ground crewman whose hand he had just patched up, the planes were to be in the air for most of the time. Ann had been called to the village and would be away for some time; he was at that moment alone. He had plenty of paperwork to keep him occupied, to say nothing of the odd accident like the one he had just treated and even the odd appendix to remove; but no matter how busy he tried to keep himself, he could not dull the feeling of fear inside himself.

Two hours later, the last Lancaster landed safely and the crews were now consuming dinner. The after-ops debriefing had been short and to the point; they would be up in two hours again to start all over again. Kirk was driving them hard; for his efforts he had been nicknamed 'Slavedriver'.

Within a week the crews were tired but ready for anything. Kirk was tired but satisfied, for his own crew - for whose benefit most of the slavedriving had been done - was also ready. All they waited for now was the message from Blake giving them precise information on the mission.

NORWAY

The normally joyful village of Rjukan was silent, and had been for almost a week. The S.S. Stormtroopers had arrived as promised and already their presence was being felt. Security had been tightened around the hydro plant and the Germans were taking no chances. The patrols had been doubled and the work passes were checked even more carefully than before.

The Resistance's inside man had reported that the plant would be producing heavy water at full capacity within the next three days. The day after he passed on the information he had been arrested by the Gestapo; he was never heard of again.

A specially coded message was sent to British Intelligence informing them of the production step up and advising them that a raid be set up immediately. The reply was - as usual - to wait; it was an order, not a request. Instructions would follow at their next contact time. The waiting game was a difficult one, but like so many occupied countries Norway had learned that with patience she too would be free again. The men and women of the Resistance sat quietly and waited; waited for a message that would eventually mean the end of their torment, and once again freedom would be for all men, not just the privileged few.

In his office, Fischer sat in angry silence. He was annoyed, more at himself than at his interrogators, for letting the Norwegian die before he had told them anything useful. That would not read well in his records. Plus, he was edgy - and that was not good, for when Fischer became edgy things usually started to happen. Standing, he crossed to the window which overlooked the valley. Snow had started to fall once again. He felt easier; there would be no attempt to destroy the factory that night.

* * * * *

BRITAIN

High Wycombe lay silent to all but the discerning eye; beneath its veneer of quiet lay a beehive, constantly working against the enemy. Air Commodore Blake sat thoughtfully behind his desk, in his hand a buff-coloured piece of paper. It had come up from the decoding room only minutes before. The message was serious; the plant at Bjukan had begun full production. He could only hope that Kirk and his men were ready. Pressing the button on his intercom, he told his secretary to send his aide in immediately. While he was waiting, he formulated the two messages he would need to send; the first message to the Resistance and the second to Group Captain Crompton in Scotland. Fifteen minutes later, the aide had delivered the two messages safely to the coding room far below the ground. Once in the hands of the people whose job it was to make messages impossible to understand except to those few who knew the code.

The first message said, "Odin must expect a heavy snowfall during the night; heavy equipment will be needed to help out." The second, to George Crompton, told him to get his men ready; tonight was the night - the commandos would be arriving shortly.

Blake laced his fingers and gazed out of the window. The one thing he was now hoping for was that this mission would be successful. If it failed, nothing in the world would stop Germany from winning the war and taking over the world. He shuddered at the thought of Hitler ruling the world. No - he would not allow himself to think of that!

The message that everyone was waiting for finally arrived at R.A.F. Blackhill at 1045. Crompton stood in the control tower, the already crumpled piece of paper safely in his breast pocket. He had read it so many times since its arrival that it was somewhat dogeared. Kirk and the rest of the squadron were due back soon from another training session and Crompton intended to be there when they landed.

At eleven, the first drone of an engine could be heard as Kirk's weary warriors began to return to their home base. The glint of sunshine on the perspex canopy of the mid-upper turret threw a myriad of colours onto the face of Paul Jones; he traced the colours with his fingers along the inside of the perspex. It really was quite beautiful - something one did not often associate with weapons of war. As his finger continued its wandering, a black speck appeared just inside his line of vision. Thumbing his mike switch, he contacted Kirk.

"Mid-upper to skipper - I think we've picked up a couple of bandits. They seem to be heading for the airfield."

"Roger. We'll have a look." Kirk turned in his seat and both he and Scott looked urgently skywards.

"Got them, sir." Scott pointed to his side of the plane. At about nine o'clock there were what looked like two ME 110s - craft Kirk knew held three of a crew - pilot, radar op. and single gunner.

"They must be going to attack the airfield. We'll have to stop them," Kirk stated as he increased air speed from a landing setting to full flight. Touching the mike switch with his right hand he prepared to inform all crews of his intentions. "Red leader to all crews. The airfield is about to be attacked. Shall we give the intruders a surprise?" A chorus of affirmatives was his reply. "Dave, radio the field and let them know they're about to receive some unwanted visitors."

"Roger, skipper, will do." Tyson turned back to his equipment and proceeded to send his message.

"This is Red leader. Close up to attack formation."

The pilots of the other nine craft immediately manoeuvred closer to Kirk and the 'Enterprise'.

Meanwhile, back at the airfield the warning siren had begun to wail. Ground crews and H.Q. personnel scattered and disappeared into the air raid shelters which were placed close to all the working areas.

The ME 110s began their attack descent, their engines screaming loudly as they plummeted earthwards. If they thought that this mission was a milk run they were mistaken; the radar op. saw, too late, the ten Lancasters that hurled themselves into the path of the 110s. The dogfight was short-lived; one plane turned into a ball of fire and fragmented as its fuel and ammunition detonated. The other limped away, smoke pouring from an engine. Kirk doubted that it would ever reach its home base. The threat gone, the Lancasters took the next half hour to set down and disembark. Crompton's staff car screeched to a halt just to the left of Kirk's plane. The C.O. didn't even wait for the driver to open the door for him; leaping from the car he rushed over to where Kirk was just emerging from the belly of his plane. The great flying boots hung in midair for a moment; the rest of James Kirk slid gracefully through the hatch and he let himself fall, his knees bending as his feet made contact with the ground. He had hardly turned round before Crompton pounced on him. "Jim, I've had a message from Blake. The mission's tonight."

"Good. Any more practice runs and the crews would have been stale. Let's get cracking, sir."

"Jolly good show with those bandits - you certainly made it a warm visit."

"A bit too warm. Any idea why they should show up just now?"

"Not really. They can't know of the mission - we only just heard ourselves; it was just probably one of their periodic visits." But Crompton looked thoughtful.

The rest of Kirk's crew had been now disembarked and sat in a group nearby, waiting for Kirk's discussion with the C.O. to come to an end. Kirk glanced round to see where his men were; seeing them gathered watching speculatively, he beckoned them over. "Can we organise a hot meal and a good rest for the crews while the ground staff arm and refuel the planes?"

"I'm sure it will be no problem. You'll take off at 2330 so there's plenty of time. You should reach your target around daybreak. Concerning an escort for the Stirling, Jim - I'd like you to be the man to do it." Crompton smiled at Kirk.

"I had intended to volunteer, sir. Now, how about that food? I'm starving, and I'm sure the rest of the men are too."

"It'll be ready by the time you've finished debriefing," Crompton promised.

He strode back to his car as the crew moved up beside Kirk. "Well, Captain, is it on?" Scott asked.

"Yes - tonight. Let's hope the Commandos can get Wiseman out without any fuss." Kirk took a deep breath; he would be glad when this mission was over. He wished he could grab a chance to say goodbye to Ann before he left, but he knew that that could be a mistake. The less he saw of her the better - he did not want their relationship turning into more than just friendship, especially since, once Wiseman had been retrieved, there was nothing to stop him going home. "Let's get to the debriefing. The sooner we finish that, the sooner we get to eat." They clambered into the back of the truck that would transport them to the main buildings. The truck's engine rumbled into life and the vehicle moved off across the airfield.

Later that evening, McCoy had discovered that the one thing that had brought them all to 1942 was about to happen. He did not relish the thought of being left behind, to be retrieved individually by the Guardian, and had immediately gone in search of Kirk to put forward his case for being allowed to go on the mission. Kirk had other ideas.

"No, Bones," Kirk finally said after listening to McCoy's arguments.

"Why?" McCoy flared.

"For one thing, to take you with us might well change history."

"History's already been changed."

"Secondly, the Guardian isn't about to let any of us stay here after the mission's complete; and thirdly, I need you here to dope Wiseman so that we can get him out of here and back to the Enterprise."

"I'd have thought you'd want to stay - with Ann!" McCoy snapped. When Kirk was being stubborn McCoy's back usually went up, and this was one of those times.

"What makes you think I want to stay?" Kirk asked, a little shocked that McCoy could think that of him.

"Well, you spent the night with her, and - " McCoy stopped. He knew he had said too much already.

Kirk looked so shaken that McCoy began to take a step towards him. "Jim - "

"How did you find out?"

"It's all round camp that you were seen leaving the dance with her - and then she dropped you off at the airfield in the morning. Jim, I warned you not to get involved!"

"It's my life - but if you must know, I had a headache. The painkillers she gave me combined with the gin I'd drunk and I passed out. That was why she didn't want me to drink anything the next night," Kirk told him. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have a job to do, and the faster I do it, the sooner we can all get home." Kirk picked up his hat and headed for the door.

"That's right - walk out on me!" McCoy called, but Kirk was gone.

McCoy stood staring at the floor for a few long moments. Then, his mind made up, he left Kirk's room, closing the door behind him.

The briefing for the night's mission over, the crews were transported to the waiting craft. The usual good luck speech from the C.O. was short and to the point; the mission for them should be routine. The cover they would be providing for the Stirling bomber and the glider carrying the fifty commandos was vital for them to slip through the tight German defences.

As usual it took half an hour for all the planes to get airborne, but once

up they looked an imposing sight as they headed away towards the coast. Kirk marshalled his crews together into a tight formation as they began to cross the coast. 30-303s crashed out over the sea as the gunners checked their armament. The sea far below looked calm and friendly, but all of them knew that to ditch in the North Sea, especially at this time of year, was more often than not fatal. The water, although it looked inviting, was extremely cold, and it would not take long for a man to slip into unconsciousness then death.

Luckily the cloud was not excessive, but enough to cover the moon every now and then and provide some cover to the cruising bombers. As usual, radio silence was maintained; their course was true, they had no decoys to draw enemy fighters; this was all part of the plan to release the Stirling and its glider into enemy airspace undetected. Kirk had taken up station slightly above his charge, watching over both Stirling and glider.

"Gunnery keep a sharp lookout. We will be reaching the coast of Norway in a few minutes." Kirk's voice was formal, his mind on the dials and gauges in front of him. Tom Davidson advised him of a slight course correction he required and Kirk manoeuvred the Lancaster the few points to the new setting. The sky had happily been clear of prowlers so far, and the convoy sailed onward unhindered.

"Ten minutes to coast, skipper." Davidson's voice registered in Kirk's mind.

"Roger, Tom. The rest of you liven up - we're about to go into action."

"Course correction in two minutes for both us and the Stirling."

"Fine, Tom." Kirk made his only radio message to the rest of the squadron. "This is Red Leader. Good luck to all of you."

The three craft slipped away from their companions just as the searchlights over the port of Stavanger pointed their eerie fingers skyward. Kirk found himself hoping that all of his squadron would make it back to the airfield safely. They seemed to be doing a good job over the port - there was a large orange stain spreading across the indigo sky. Kirk and his crew would soon be able to join the others on the return trip to Blackhill; now they were nearing the site for the glider landing.

"Skipper, eight minutes and we should see the signal from the Resistance people off our port wing."

"Thanks, Tom. Dave make contact with our companion and ask if they're ready for the descent."

"Roger, skipper." Tyson turned back to his radio equipment. "I've just got a roger, skipper, they're on their way down."

"Thank God for that." The voice sounded in his headpiece.

"What was that, Scotty? I didn't quite catch it." Kirk turned slightly towards the engineer.

"Sorry, Captain, I didna' say a thing. I was too busy watching the Stirling."

"Of course he didn't say anything - I did."

"Scotty - did that sound like someone we know?" Kirk asked, not believing his ears.

"Well, Captain, it did sound a wee bit like Dr. McCoy, but it couldna' be - he was left back at the airfield."

"Oh no he wasn't," sang the familiar voice.

"Oh my God, NO!" Kirk looked very annoyed. "Did you help him, Scotty?"

"Not I, sir - I havena' seen him all day." Scotty looked surprised.

"Won't somebody come and get poor old me? It's cold and it's dark and I can't find the bathroom." McCoy sounded drunk.

"Where on earth is he, Scotty?" Kirk could not imagine a hiding place big enough for a grown man to disappear into.

"Well, sir, the only places I can think of are the rest bed or the Elsan toilet."

"You'd better go and find him. He sounded pretty strange just now."

"Aye, Captain - he definitely didn't sound like himself."

"Why are you talking about me and not coming to get me? I'm lost and I need to go to the john," McCoy's disembodied voice spoke out again.

"All right, I'm comin' for ye." Scott lurched out of his harness and seat as the plane hit an air pocket. Grumbling, he staggered off in the direction of the tail. The rest of the crew had stayed silent during the exchange, but that hadn't stopped them grinning from ear to ear over the conversation. What had McCoy been drinking? More importantly, how did he come to be aboard?

When Scott eventually managed to track down the errant McCoy, he found him stretched out on the emergency rest bed, the oxygen mask on his face but nothing coming from the tank. The Doctor was suffering from lack of oxygen; by now he had passed out. Scott hurriedly connected a new cylinder and replaced the mask, tucked a blanket round the still form then began to make his way back to the front of the plane. He had nearly gained his seat when a signal was received from the Stirling's pilot that the coupling from the bomber to the glider had jammed, and that he could not separate from it. The only action he could take was to try a dive and see if that would release the glider; the only explanation was that ice had formed at the high altitude. A dive could shake it loose.

Scott slid into his seat and watched.

"Pull up! Pull up, damn you!" Kirk muttered.

The pilot was trying to pull the nose of his plane up but they could see that the response was too sluggish. Then the two aircraft hit the ground. Kirk and Scott shielded their eyes from the immediate explosion.

"Oh, my God." Scott looked shaken.

"They've all gone. The pilot, the crew, the commandoes." Kirk was obviously shaken too. They circled the area for a moment, trying to see if anyone had managed to scramble clear, but nothing stirred beneath them. Kirk straightened the Lancaster again. "Tom, how far to the rendezvous point?"

"About a mile and a half. They should have flares out any moment now."

"We're going in. We've no choice; our orders are to get Wiseman back to Starfleet. We'll have to get him back from here ourselves."

"But, sir, the commandoes were supposed to blow up the plant at the same time," Tyson reminded him.

"Yes, but at least the R.A.F. can set up another bombing run later - even tomorrow night - but right now, we have to get Wiseman." Kirk was determined on that. This mission was too risky for his liking; twentieth century warfare held a viciousness he could do without. He wanted it over with so that he could return to his beloved Enterprise. "Which way, Tom?"

"Two points to starboard and it should be just over that hill."

"Right."

As they soared over the hilltop the yellow flares sprang up in a runway lighting system. The Lancaster landed, if not perfectly, at least adequately. As she rolled to a stop, a dozen or so amazed Norwegians surrounded the plane. Kirk and his crew scrambled out, Scott humping the still unconscious McCoy.

"You are not what we were expecting." A large blond-haired man in his late forties was the first to speak.

"There was an accident. The plane you were expecting crashed."

The man muttered something in Norwegian - an obvious exclamation of shock. He recovered quickly. "We can't talk here; you must come with me."

"What about the plane?"

"My friends will hide it." He turned and began to stride away. Kirk and his men had no choice but to follow.

Some fifteen minutes later they arrived at a chalet. The door was opened cautiously by a young girl. Her eyes questioned their guide as they entered.

"Something went wrong," he said. "I must radio England for instructions." He disappeared into a back room. The girl gestured for them to sit down.

They were grateful for the seat by then. "Would you like a hot drink?" she asked.

"Thank you." Kirk managed a smile. As she bustled round, she said,

"What went wrong?"

Kirk told her. Her face went pale. "Oh, no! Horrible!"

She gave them steaming mugs of hot chocolate. They wrapped their hands round the mugs, grateful for the heat - the room was warm enough, but they were still chilled from the frosty conditions outside.

When the blond man came back into the room, Kirk moved towards him, his face questioning. The Norwegian nodded. "You are to wait here. It seems you will have a passenger. The man who has been helping the Germans at the plant has been abducted by a British agent and will be here shortly. You are to return them both to your base."

"Good." At least their mission was going to be successful. "When will they get here?"

"Half an hour, to judge by the report coming in."

Kirk moved back to his chair. Nobody felt like talking; the loss of the Stirling and the glider was too fresh in their minds. The silence was only broken by a soft grunt and moan from the still figure on the bed at the opposite side of the room.

The girl raised her head from where she was watching the unconscious McCoy. "He's coming round," she said unnecessarily.

"Oh, my head!"

"Hurts, does it?" Kirk asked. "It deserves to."

McCoy let his groan answer for him. "Where am I?"

"Norway," Kirk said curtly.

The others glanced at each other, wisely remaining silent. When Kirk used that tone, wise men stayed out of his way.

"Norway." McCoy groaned again. "How did I get here?"

Kirk glared at him. Even if he had been inclined to forget McCoy's disobedience he could not let the Doctor get away with it; not with junior officers present. "Dr. McCoy, did I or did I not give you strict instructions to stay behind?"

"I think you said..." McCoy glanced at Kirk, assessed the state of his temper, and capitulated. "Yes."

"Well? What made you decide to stow away?"

"It seemed like a good idea at the time," McCoy said gloomily. "Now I'm not so sure."

"You are on report, Doctor."

McCoy could not think of anything to say, except to repeat weakly, "I just didn't fancy being stuck in Scotland while you were...here." He had suddenly realised the presence of the two Norwegians and altered what he had been about to say with hardly a pause.

Kirk's eyes softened. "Point taken."

* * * * *

It was an understatement to say that Spock was anything but comfortable. He had been uneasy ever since the Captain had gone through the Time Portal; now, as he stepped onto the transporter platform he could not stop his thoughts from straying. Ever since the call from the Guardian asking him to beam down wearing warm winter clothing and a ski mask, Spock had been more than a little worried, especially as there was no explanation, only the direct request that sounded more like an order. Spock shimmered and vanished from the ship.

The Time Guardian was waiting for him when he materialised. Once the transporter effect released him, Spock stepped forward urgently. "Sir?"

"Ah, Mr. Spock, I see you have managed to obtain the necessary clothing." He looked at the expression of controlled patience on the Vulcan's face. "Perhaps I should explain."

"I would be grateful if you did."

"Captain Kirk and his crew have left for Norway. Unfortunately, they will be too late to capture Mr. Wiseman; your scientist has been granted an appointment with Hitler. By the time your Captain arrives, Mr. Wiseman will be on his way to Berlin. You must get him out tonight."

Spock's eyebrows lifted. "I do not understand. When the Captain left, you informed him that I could not go."

"No, you could not go to R.A.F. Blackhill; but where you will be going, you will be able to retain your outer clothing. Provided you can escape capture, your appearance will go unnoticed."

"I see," Spock replied as he donned the black ski mask,

"Now the hood." The Guardian surveyed him carefully, nodding as he handed him a small cardboard folder. "You are Tor Ericson, 'officially' a British Intelligence Officer working with the Resistance in Norway. Those are your passes and papers. You are expected. The Time Portal will deposit you inside the complex; the rest is up to you. I can only do so much."

Spock took up his position on the pad of the Time Portal. The Guardian crossed to the control panel and touched a switch. Spock shimmered away.

He materialised in a small dark corridor. He swung round to make sure no-one had seen his arrival. First he had to locate the other Resistance operators in the plant.

Later, he refused to admit that it was luck, and insisted that the Guardian had somehow arranged matters so that the first person he met was one of those agents. As he rounded the next corner, he saw, listening at a door, a young Norwegian, who jumped when Spock touched his shoulder.

"Tor!" He breathed a sigh of relief. "Tor, Wiseman is alone - should we take him now?"

"The guards will be changing soon." How did he know that? Of course - the Guardian must be directing his thoughts. "Yes; now is as good a time as any - but first, let me talk to him."

Spock knocked on the door, waited for a moment, then entered, closing the door behind him. The young Norwegian glanced anxiously up and down the corridor

as he waited, alert for any outcry from within. Then the door opened again, and to his surprise Wiseman came out with Ericsson, apparently quite content to accompany them. Knowing that Wiseman was a traitor who would not wish to return to his own country he glanced at the Intelligence agent with considerable respect, wondering just what argument Ericsson had used. What he did not know was that Spock, having applied a light neck pinch had then utilised a mind touch that gave him control over Wiseman's mind.

Wiseman followed the two men down the corridor, passing two S.S. guards, neither of whom showed any surprise at seeing them. They knew that the scientist was due to leave for Berlin at any time, and merely supposed him to be on his way.

They proceeded to the main gate, having stopped long enough to obtain for the scientist a heavy coat with a hood that obscured part of his face. At the gate, Spock felt in his pocket for his papers, mentally instructing Wiseman to do the same and produce the papers the Vulcan had carefully placed in his pocket. The young Resistance agent did likewise. The guard examined the papers closely and let them past. The three men walked unhurriedly down the hill and into the village, where they hastily entered one of the more intact buildings. Spock stayed there with Wiseman while his companion went off in search of other Resistance workers who could provide transport.

Spock sat, outwardly calm, inwardly quite tense; how long before Wiseman was missed? He shivered slightly, thankful for the warm clothes the Guardian had instructed him to wear. Finally his friend arrived with a truck and within an hour of collecting Wiseman they were on their way to the Resistance contact point in the Telemark Mountains.

Once they were out of the immediate area of the village, Spock relaxed his control on Wiseman. It took the scientist some moments to realise where he was. "Who -- what -- I demand an explanation!"

"Later. I suggest you remain quiet and do not attempt to escape. You are in enough trouble as it is."

Wiseman considered his situation, and realised that he was trapped. If this was who he suspected it could be, he would shortly be back in his own time. "Who sent you for me?"

"Admiral Hailey is waiting for your return," Spock told him. Wiseman's shoulders slumped; he had gambled, and he had lost. There was no point in fighting -- especially since he realised that Starfleet had taken the risk of sending a Vulcan after him. He knew that if he tried to resist, Spock would merely take control of his mind once again...

"We'll have to walk from here," the driver said abruptly. The road, which had been rising steadily, was now blocked by a snowdrift that the truck could not force its way through.

"Is it far?" Wiseman asked, totally subdued.

"About three miles; we'll be there by first light if we hurry."

The crew of the Lancaster sat huddled round the fire warming themselves. Their host had finally obtained an answer from Britain; they were to wait for twenty-four hours and then during the following night they were to destroy the hydro plant by setting as much explosive as the Resistance could get hold of -- regardless of how many lives were lost. Nobody said anything.

Kirk scowled. "If they think I'm going to kill innocent people, they've had it!" he growled. "Besides, our original orders were to get Wiseman out, and you say that's been done." He looked at the Resistance leader. "We have to get him home."

"Yes. We will blow up the plant," the Norwegian told him. "And we can make sure that none of our people are there."

Spock, Wiseman and their driver struggled through the snow. As they reached the top of the hill, they saw a German radio detector van, its aerial rotating in the direction they were going. It stopped behind the stranded truck.

"They've homed in on Leif's transmitter. We'd better move fast! Luckily we've got a reasonable lead, and we know where we're going."

They reached the house relatively easily. As they stumbled in the door, the man inside reached for a gun, then relaxed as he saw who it was. "Welcome, Bjorn."

Relief was short-lived, however, as Bjorn hurriedly warned them of the nearby detector van. Leif turned to Kirk. "Quickly, Squadron Leader - this place will be swarming with Germans soon, and you must get away before that happens. You must get this traitor back to where he can do no further harm." He turned to Spock. "What will you do, Tor?"

"I must return to Britain with the prisoner," he said quietly. Kirk was already at the door, looking out cautiously, but there was still no sign of the enemy.

"I will let Britain know that you are on your way," Leif said. "Good luck."

They hurried away, heading for the snow-covered Lancaster. Once there, Spock made sure that the prisoner was securely positioned in the rest area and then made himself comfortable for take-off. He did want to know why McCoy was there, but knew he would find out later.

Once the plane had left the ground Spock removed his hood and ski mask, revealing his face. Slowly, he made his way through the plane to the cockpit, leaving some very surprised men behind him.

"Prisoner secure, Captain," he informed Kirk.

"Spock?" Kirk could not believe his eyes. "How?"

"It's a long story," Spock replied evasively as Scott vacated the co-pilot's seat to make way for him.

"I'm all ears," Kirk told him just as McCoy's voice came over the intercom -

"How come Spock always manages to turn up?"

"I'm about to find out - but I'm quite sure it wasn't the same way you did."

"You'll never let me live that down, will you?"

"No."

Ann Marsh stood on the watch tower counting the planes as they landed. The ninth one had just taxied to a stop, and still there was no sign of Kirk's plane. She was worried; this was so like a previous occasion when the plane she had awaited failed to return. The wind blew her hair back off her face.

Surely someone would be able to give her some information? She headed down the outside stairway. The Wing Commander appeared out of the door that led to the control room. He looked slightly worried, but paused when he saw her.

"Dave - anything on Jim Kirk's plane?"

"The last we heard was that he had landed in Norway and was awaiting further instructions." Just then a young W.A.A.F appeared with a sheet of paper which she gave him. He glanced down at it. "He took off about half an hour ago. I'd better report to the C.O."

She nodded. "Don't worry, Dave, I'll keep it to myself." She walked him back to her car and drove him to the C.O.'s office.

The Lancaster's crew had been listening to Spock's story, forgetting that the Lancaster did not have the efficient sensors they were used to on the Enterprise. None of them saw the two Messerschmitts until it was too late. Bullets from their machine guns ripped through the cockpit; Kirk felt a hot substance trickle down his left arm, from which all sensation had suddenly disappeared. The plane plunged into a dive; steeper and steeper, until it exploded as it hit the ground. Satisfied that no-one had escaped alive, the hungry vultures turned away and headed for home, yet another lone craft to their total.

Ann Marsh sat quietly by her desk, pondering over what she had just written in her diary, which was still lying open on her desk. She put her pen down with a depressed sigh. She would never get used to death.

'Jim Kirk...' it started. 'He was a man I could have loved, once I had had time to get over Andy's death. He was a friend when I needed a shoulder to cry on. I shall miss him. So many young men like him have given their lives for their country. Yet - for some reason I will miss Leonard even more. He had so much to offer the medical world - some of the things he showed me are far beyond anything I have ever seen. For he has disappeared without trace. From something he said, I suspect that he stowed away on Jim's plane before they left on that fateful flight. If so, he too is dead, with Jim as I'm sure they would have wanted it. We'll never know for sure, of course, unless the M.P.s find any evidence indicating otherwise. Yes - they were both special in every way. Whatever happens in the future, I will cherish the memory of them. They taught me the true meaning of friendship.'

Ann wiped a tear from her face as she closed the diary. She sat for a moment longer, then pulling herself together she lifted her white overcoat from the back of her chair and shouldered into it. She was once more in charge of the hospital at R.A.F. Blackhill and there was a great deal for her to do.

She left her office. Each corner held its own memory of times and people, past and present. If the walls could talk, she wondered what stories they would choose to tell...

* * * * *

The Time Guardian turned a dial on the control panel of his console and waited. Ten figures slowly materialised on the platform. As soon as he could move, Spock turned to Kirk, who stood, his right hand pressed firmly to his left shoulder. It was dripping red.

"I'm all right," he replied to the unasked question. He turned his attention to the Time Guardian. "Starfleet will be in touch with you, sir."

"You are hurt. I am sorry."

"Don't worry, it's only a nick. I'll be all right."

McCoy had been regarding Kirk closely, but without his scanner there was no way that he could tell how badly the Captain was injured. Spock was equally concerned. He spoke into his communicator. "Spock to Enterprise."

"Enterprise. Uhura here."

"Ten to beam up. Mr. Sulu, have an emergency unit standing by; we have a casualty. Spock out."

Kirk came to in sickbay, unable to remember how he got there. "Spock?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Here, Jim." The soft reply came from the side of his bed.

"The prisoner?" It was a measure of his weakness that he did not attempt to sit up.

"Safely in the brig."

"Good. Starfleet Command?"

"Are pleased that all went well. Admiral Hailey will rendezvous with us at Starbase 20 in three days."

"And by that time you'll be up and about again - if you do as you're told," McCoy interrupted.

"I've no intention of even trying to get out of this bed for at least two days. I'm exhausted! If anyone tells you that flying is easy, don't believe them - I could sleep for a week."

McCoy looked speculatively at Spock. "Spock, there was this Air Commodore - you should have seen him. He looked just like you - apart from the ears, that is."

"You mean Air Commodore Blake?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I have seen his picture. His daughter Amanda married a Stephen Grayson..."

"Are you trying to say that he was your great great something or other?"

"Yes. Military tradition is long-standing on my mother's side of the family."

A slight snore interrupted them. Both men looked down; Kirk was fast asleep.

"That sedative I gave him will keep him reasonably quiet for the next twenty-four hours," McCoy commented. "I don't guarantee anything beyond that. Come on, Spock - he won't tell you everything he did - but I can!"

He led the unresisting Vulcan into his office.

